THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

OCTOBER 50¢ 1964

brilliant new spy novelet

HOLLY ROTH

The Spy Who Was So Obvious

crime short novel —complete!

VICTOR CANNING

Love and Larceny on the Riviera

"Wholly delightful"... about "a young rogue in the grand manner... his intricate misadventures had me happily chortling aloud" —Anthony Boucher

new police procedural story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

unusual thriller by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

new medical detective story by

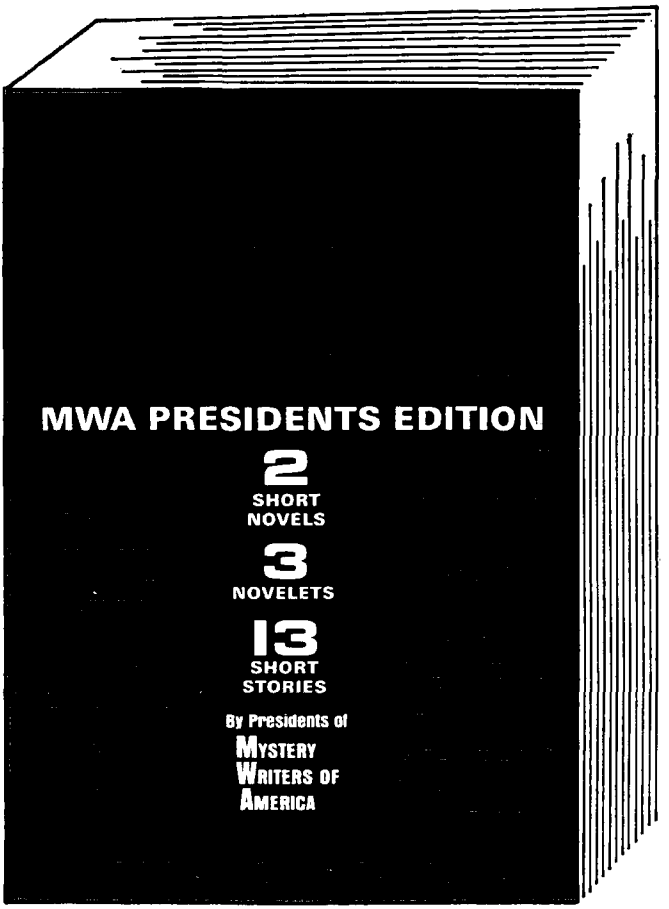
LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!

ON SALE SEPTEMBER 15th

at leading newsstands—or use coupon below



Look at the line-up of authors—you won't want to miss reading a single story.
Use the coupon on the right—your copy will be rushed to you to enjoy the most suspenseful fiction you've ever read.

Turn to page 34 for extra coupon

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY E1064
505 Park Avenue • New York, N.Y. 10022

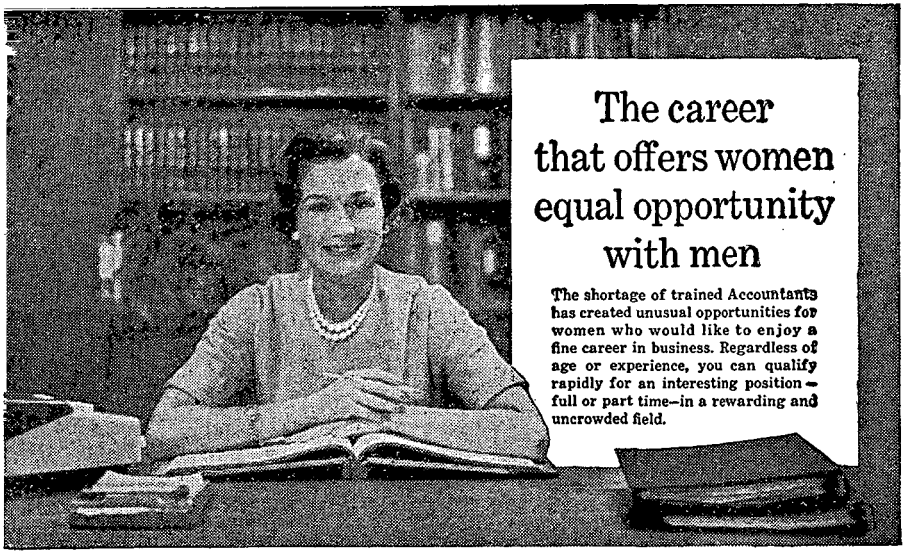
Please send me _____ copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1965 ANTHOLOGY NO. 8. I am enclosing $1 for each copy ($1.25 outside U.S.A.).

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The career that offers women equal opportunity with men

The shortage of trained Accountants has created unusual opportunities for women who would like to enjoy a fine career in business. Regardless of age or experience, you can qualify rapidly for an interesting position—full or part time—in a rewarding and uncrowded field.

Enjoy prestige and high pay in Accounting

LA SALLE TRAINS YOU AT HOME IN YOUR SPARE TIME

Earn an independent income in a profession where salaries are high and promotions are frequent—and where women qualify as readily as men. Without interfering with your present job or responsibilities, you can prepare for a career in Accounting through LaSalle spare-time training.

No previous bookkeeping experience is necessary. LaSalle's distinguished faculty starts you at the beginning; explains every basic Accounting principle and method; gives you actual Accounting problems with your lessons, then corrects and grades your work. Your training is complete, practical and enjoyable. You are thoroughly prepared for every Accounting task you will handle in the business world.

For more than half a century, LaSalle has been a world leader in business training. Its students total more than 1,000,000 ambitious men and women. A LaSalle diploma in Accounting is a credential respected by America's biggest companies. Send for free illustrated booklet and sample lesson. Address: 417 S. Dearborn, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

"My salary is 305% more than when I first started to work. I am employed by the state of Alabama as an Accountant. This is a professional rating. Being a LaSalle graduate has meant so much!"—*Mrs. Anne P. Cox, Elmore, Alabama.*

"Thanks to my LaSalle training I have been given the opportunity to reorganize and install accounting systems and procedures. My earnings have risen from $70.00 per week to $175.00 per week with many fringe benefits."—*Mary M. Nyberg, Hollywood, California.*

"I have the highest regard for your training — also for the personal interest the LaSalle instructors give each lesson."—*Mae Whitledge, Memphis, Tennessee.*

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

417 S. Dearborn, Dept. 34-050, Chicago, Illinois 60605

Please send me, free of cost or obligation, your illustrated booklet "Opportunities in Accounting" and also your interesting sample lesson.

Name.....Age.....

Address.....County.....

City &
Zone.....State.....

Canadian Residents: Write LaSalle, Box 1001, Montreal 3, Quebec

T14

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The new 87th Precinct Mystery

AX BY ED McBAIN

In a dark cellar lies the elderly victim of a brutal ax murder — and Detectives Steve Carella and Cotton Hawes confront their most macabre and baffling case — murder with a shatteringly ironic twist of motive. Just published. An Inner Sanctum Mystery.

$3.50. SIMON AND SCHUSTER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

including BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

NEW SPY NOVELET

THE SPY WHO WAS SO OBVIOUS — *Holly Roth* — 6

CRIME SHORT NOVEL—complete

LOVE AND LARCENY ON THE RIVIERA — *Victor Canning* — 122

5 NEW DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

GOODBYE, STRANGER — *Lawrence G. Blochman* — 35

JUST LIKE INSPECTOR MAIGRET — *Vincent McConnor* — 67

MYSTERY ON THE MALPAIS — *Neil M. Clark* — 76

THE TAHITIAN POWDER BOX MYSTERY — *James Holding* — 88

D AS IN DETAIL — *Lawrence Treat* — 111

4 CRIME STORIES

ADVENTURES OF A FOUNTAIN PEN — *Cornell Woolrich* — 40

WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN? — *Richard M. Gordon* — 66

THE LONG AND DEADLY GAME — *Fred Rodewald* — 99

THE CRIME OF AVERY MANN — *Edward D. Hoch* — 106

EQMM "FIRST STORY"

DEATHS ON THE HIAWASSEE — *Tom Varner Purser* — 55

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 54

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — *Anthony Boucher* — 65

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 44, No. 4, Whole No. 251, OCT., 1964. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50¢ a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1964 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention.* *Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher*
MELVIN FLAMM, *Business Manager*
LEONARD F. PINTO, *Production Director*
CLAYTON RAWSON, *Managing Editor*
CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
FRANK TAGGART, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a brilliant *NEW* spy *NOVELET* by

HOLLY ROTH

About—

a master of indirection—and misdirection

a detective who thinks upside down, inside out, and backwards—most un*British*

a plot that threatened Gibraltar, Two-C, NATO, the Western alliance —the entire balance of world power . . .

and one of the finest spy stories that has ever appeared in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" . . .

THE SPY WHO WAS SO OBVIOUS

by HOLLY ROTH

"GEORGE!" I YELLED INTO THE phone. "George?"

"Jimmy? What are you yelling about?" His voice came through as if he were at my elbow.

"Oh." I subsided. "How are you?"

"Fine. And you? What's with the Andorra piece?"

"Mailed it yesterday," I said.

"Mailed . . . By the way, where are you?"

"Gib."

"What's Gib? *Gibraltar!* And this call, of course, is collect?"

"It's business, George. What I called you about—"

"You think we editors never have to account for anything? Last time it was Zanzibar. Now, you listen—"

"George, just chalk it up to the cost of the piece. The piece will be a honey."

"You had to go to Gibraltar to mail an article on Andorra to New York?"

"No, I mean the article on Gibraltar," I said.

"*What* article on Gibraltar?" The pause was tiny. Then he exploded. "If any of these clowns here have commissioned you to write—"

"No, no. I'm going straight to the top—to *you*. I'm telling you I want to do a piece on Gibraltar."

"Why? No."

"Listen to me, George. It's a fascinating place. Think of it—less than three miles long, never a mile wide, one vast honeycomb of ancient caves, man-made tunnels and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

galleries—the Bastion of the West—"

"You suggesting you're going to sell me a hunk of statistics?"

"No, no. But, George, tell me—what's Andorra got that Gibraltar hasn't got?"

"Smugglers."

"And what's so hot about smugglers?" I demanded.

"The interest of the reading public, that's what's hot."

"So every travel mag feels it's got to do a piece on Andorra every six months? Look at Gib—a fortress—the spit of land where the greatest ocean meets the greatest sea—"

"The Pacific is the greatest ocean, chum, and the Atlantic and the Mediterranean really meet somewhere around Tarifa, miles below Gib."

(Editors are hell all around, but the educated ones are the worst.)

"Look," he said, "you just happen to need dough? Is that it?"

"I won't lie to you, George—but I don't *just* need dough. I'm hot on this place. I don't think enough has been said about it."

"Jimmy, you ever hear me claim that *Travel* is purely educational? Look, I won't be hurt if you want to try a piece on Gibraltar for *The National Geographic*."

I sulked. I wondered if he knew that they considered me illiterate.

"And how," he asked with his usual inconsistency, "how could we get any decent shots?"

"The photographic possibilities are magnificent! There's—"

"Fog, rock, and The Prudential Insurance Company of America. An overdone pot roast going moldy green." He paused and then said with a note of finality, "You want to hang around there for a while? Okay, hang." I didn't like the sound of that, and I was right because he added, "But you're off the expense account, bub." Then he softened, but not much. "Tell you, Jimmy, if you can find a hook, something like Andorra's smugglers, then maybe. But right now, *hang up!*"

He beat me to it.

I wandered forlornly up a side street—so-called; Gib's side streets are usually alleys with names longer than they are, like Parody's Passage or Bomb House Lane. I felt a little angry; that pot-roast crack burned me. *I* thought of Gibraltar as a sleeping giant under a downy, soft-gray blanket—the little cloud that so often hung protectively above it.

And I was sad, too, and even a little afraid—afraid that I had lost my touch. You see, free-lance article writers for the big magazines are a special breed, a small group of hard-drinking, much-traveled, well-paid *salesmen*. Most of us can't write; we're sloppy about facts and figures—the magazines' research departments have learned the hard way and they can now be depended on to check us—and nine out of ten

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of us need the assistance of a photographer, never having plumbed the mysteries of light and distance —providing, of course, we could focus in the first place.

But we *are* superb salesmen. We show up in an editor's office, brimming with confidence and ideas, and sell the guy an article on Timbuktu—a *new angle* on Timbuktu. There sits the poor chap, papered to his desk until evening when he pulls a few sheets loose and takes off with them for Westchester; and whether in New York, Westchester, or in the gritty in-between, all he does is try to dream up article ideas. He's got six to ten frantic associates doing the same thing, and they're *all* brain-fagged. So then someone like me shows up, bubbling with enthusiasm, and with a *new angle*—and they're too tired to resist or to decide whether the "new angle" is good or bad, ancient or merely old. But we paint it up and we sell it to them.

So here I was, a supersalesman, aglow with the first piece of reportage I ever really itched to do—and I couldn't sell it.

A great author once told me that the only thing he couldn't seem to write was the autobiographical novel he had been plotting and planning for over twenty years. "Truth," he said, "is the most difficult thing to tell."

Maybe that was the explanation.

Ahead of me I saw a bar, so naturally I wandered in. Standard, comfortable, lots of dark oak. There was one other guy who was drinking beer. I ordered some of the same.

We got to talking, and later I realized that that must have come about because Alistair was a little drunk. Normally Alistair was reserved by nature and by profession —he was a cop, a detective—and besides, he was usually a soft-drink man. As for me, I'll talk to anyone, and I'm predisposed to the Gibraltarians, who fascinate me. They are a unique race, basically Latin over which are imposed a certain British punctiliousness, pride, and propriety—and if that isn't a hell of a combination (I yelled mentally at George the editor) what is?

Alistair, it turned out, was drowning a problem; he had been punctured in his punctiliousness, pride, and propriety. He said sadly, "'Good show,' that's what he said to me."

"Who? But that's a compliment, isn't it?"

"The Chief. And you know what he added?"

"No, what did he add? Who's the Chief?"

"Chief of Police. He added, 'Most un-British.'"

"Oo-la-la," I said, getting my languages mixed. "Tch. What had you done that was Good Show but un-British?"

"I caught a spy. Sure, I had to think contrariwise, topsy-turvy, upside down and backwards—but I saved Two-C from de-mo-li-shun. I saved Gibraltar and NATO, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gibraltar's pride and the West's pride. I saved the Navy and maybe the British Commonwealth—"

"Wait a minute. Spy? A real spy?"

"International type. Well known to all governments. Changes sides like underpants."

"But you're a cop, a local cop? Forgive me, but I don't see how . . ."

"Not my cup of tea, that's what you mean? How right you are, sir. But no one else wanted to bother with this chap, and so they wished him on me. And I caught him. But, you see, I had to think backwards. Negatively." His sad eyes watered. "Most un-British, y'see?"

The old idea-man was percolating like three Italian espressos. I had been seeded like a baby cloud and I was about to pour out, down, and over. What did Gibraltar have that Andorra didn't have, eh? "Look," I said to Alistair, "I *don't* see, not really. Why don't you tell me about it?"

A little sobriety wavered over Alistair—a squeezing squint, an attempt at focus. "Well, I couldn't, y'know. Or at least I'd have to, ah, fawncy it up a bit."

His British, in view of the fact that it carried a strong Andalusian accent, charmed me. Altogether, Alistair charmed me—perhaps because he struck me as typical of his race. He wasn't particularly tall or particularly short, and he wasn't especially handsome or especially homely. He had a faintly round, rather snubbed face, with sandy eyebrows, a head of flat black hair, round, sad, dark-brown eyes, and an unforgettable mustache—that is, it would have been unforgettable if it hadn't been the current fashion among Gibraltarians.

They wear a sort of black open-topped tent—high like a teepee—over their mouths. Looks so much like a caret sign that I keep wondering what's going to be inserted. The crowning touch of that mustache made him so darn Gibraltarian that I couldn't imagine why he looked a little more distinctive to me, a little familiar . . . and then I had it. He was a cross between Laurel and Hardy, with Stan's watery sadness and some of Hardy's round resilience.

The total impossibility of such a hybrid delighted me, and the possibilities in his story entranced me. "Tell me," I said encouragingly. "Fawncy it up, if necessary. Have another beer. Start at the beginning."

"The beginning was Interpol."

"But you said Gibraltar!"

"Oh, it got here fast enough. Seemed too fast for almost everyone around here. Except me. I'm just a detective, you know? Take orders, you know? Just—"

"Low man on the totem pole?" I suggested, thinking in terms of teepees.

"That's right, sir. Beautifully put. So it finally got down to me. On a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tuesday afternoon, it was. Tuesday, just a little less than three weeks ago . . ."

The problem showed the embryo of existence in Paris, where "information received" prompted Interpol to dispatch a telegram to London. In London, the Special Branch found that the merest of scannings was all that was necessary to determine the next step—simply that the message was recoded and sent off to Gibraltar.

In Gibraltar it filtered its way from top security down—but "filtered" in a British way: there was no Spanish manañas, no German super-bollixing-efficiency, no French shrug-and-a-glass-of-wine first. It reached the Immigration Office less than an hour after receipt at the top level.

Opposite Barclay's Bank, in the pleasant little street called Irish Town, much of Gibraltar's local officialdom stands in neat array—the Police Station, the Education Department, the Immigration Office. The first is red brick with unlikely Gothic arches; the last two are painted a dark blue-green clearly copied from Kentucky's grass.

Behind the vibrant front of the Immigration Office, usually staffed by five or six not overburdened civil servants, there was normal peace on that Tuesday less than three weeks ago. Then the disruptive message arrived and was handed into the neat little glass box that distinguished rather than sheltered the official in charge. He called in a subordinate, said, "Read that," and picked up his phone.

The assistant read: "Alec Haupt, alias Gordon Smith, alias Alain Dupont, etc., etc., believed to have entered Gibraltar within forty-eight hours. Calling himself Percy Elliott. Australian passport. In view of imminence of Two-C, be alerted."

The superior of the two men said, "They may be wrong." He tapped the telephone's cradle. "No such name on the lists. Not even a single Australian this week. However, not got a report today as yet—"

He interrupted himself and said into the phone, "Immigration and Police post at La Linea, please," and then, "John? Ferdy here. Good morning to you. Tell me, any Australians lately? This morning? Name?"

He waited a minute, then said, "Yes? Elliott, Percy. The details?" He listened, said, "Thanks," and hung up. His face was grim.

"One Percy Elliott, Australian, no visa naturally, not required of a British subject. Passport old, much stamped, last renewed at the Embassy in Madrid. Every bit of it an elaborate fake, of course."

"Alec Haupt," the subordinate said. "Carrumba! Who's he working for now?"

"Who knows? Last rumor was that he had a profitable thing going

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the Russians, but someone else said the Chinese."

"And what's our responsibility?"

"The exact point." His superior looked deeply at a glass wall. "Well," he said at last, "I think our responsibility is under the bridge. In theory we shouldn't have let him in. If we had known in time—"

"Despite the valid passport?"

"We might have found a fly speck that invalidated something."

"Couldn't we still find the fly speck?"

"I—think—not. No. First because to keep someone out is one thing; but to *expel* a man in possession of a British passport . . ." He looked sad. "Second, because we will have to see what the others want to do. Meanwhile, we will initiate inquiries through Madrid."

"Through proper channels? That will take weeks!"

"Sure will. Got a better suggestion?"

"But Two-C starts in less than ten days." He glanced at the wall calendar beside his superior. "Nine days."

"Got a better suggestion?"

"See what the others want done?"

"Ex-actly. Fellow's inside our fortress, and it's not our fault. We take proper steps to trace the whys of his passport. If requested, and *empowered* to do more, we'll then act." He settled back, looking more comfortable. "This is just the Immigration Department. It's now a matter of what the others want done."

There may be less buck passing in Gibraltar officialdom than any place else in the world—partly because of their heritage of British training (every man must do his duty); partly because a buck passer cannot operate in anonymity—everybody at the least knows everybody else, if indeed they don't happen to be cousins; partly because there is an inevitable competition between the English, especially in the Services, and those locally recruited.

The English sometimes forget that the Gibraltarian is British; they are often, to say the very least, tactless. And the Gibraltarian, civil servant or otherwise, is defensive, perhaps overly so.

Then there's the matter of language. The Gibraltarian speaks Spanish until he goes to school. There, largely depending on his aptitude for languages, he may or may not learn English. But the percentage who speak English without a trace of accent is minute. And among the very few English who learn passable Spanish, only a handful learn the local version, which is strongly Andalusian. An Englishman who speaks a good Castiliano might as well not bother.

The competition is also heightened by annoyance over an ever-recurring error—on the part of the English and most of the rest of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world—of referring to and thinking of the Gibraltarian as a Spaniard. The nearest comparable error, even more widespread and equally senseless, is the use of "Dutch" for "German." But that, at least, is an error of semantics. Rarely do even the ignorant assume that a Dutchman *is* a German, or vice versa. But even the educated often—indeed, usually— assume that the Gibraltarian *is* a Spaniard, at least by heritage.

Although he likes his neighbor the Andalusian, the Gibraltarian is not Andalusian, not even Spanish. The Gibraltarian speaks Spanish, with a strong Andaloo accent, and he has, in the last few generations, quite often married Andalusians, so adding to his original trace of Spanish blood; but his children are Gibraltarian and British, not Spanish or Andalusian.

Finally, the Gibraltarian is a Latin—a mixture of Genoese, Portuguese, Minorcan, Maltese, Spanish, with a strong trace of Jewish and a lesser tinge of British but being largely Latin does not make the Gibraltarian Spanish, and since, truth to tell, he has the usual British sense of superiority he is inclined—in a mild and gentle fashion—to look down on his Spanish neighbor. And so he does not appreciate the error.

But in the course of the affair of Alec Haupt—of the most unwelcome presence on Gibraltar of Alec Haupt—pride did not seem to enter, and competition did not raise its lively head; and nobody, except poor Alistair, showed any desire to concern himself.

In the Admiralty Building inside the guarded and restricted Dockyards, the English gentleman who was ultimately responsible for Naval Security looked through his open door at the sign on the corridor wall—*A Secret Shared is NOT a Secret*—and said, "Alec Haupt, um? Nasty type. Rather not have him on the Rock. Can't they expel him?"

"Not without a Directive, sir. Steps can be taken—are being taken, I understand—to prove his passport false. But that will be a lengthy process. Unless there is a Directive to remove it from him by force, and imprison him."

"A Directive from whom? Good heavens, you're not suggesting that *I* issue any such, um, a Directive? Maybe he *isn't* Alec Haupt."

"Interpol—"

"—is not infallible. No, no, I think this is not our concern. No, no. I consider this a local concern."

"Two-C —"

"You know of any direct threat to Two-C?"

"No, sir."

"Um!"

Government House itself sent Directives; they sent Directives in every direction: "At all times and especially in view of the imminence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Two-C, all steps should be taken, security should be unbreached, attention should be unflagging." The steps, however, were not mapped, and the matter of who was to peel his eyeballs was left slumbering.

The Royal Military Police filed the Directive pending further instructions.

The Regimental Colonel said, "Most disturbing. Hope they do something quickly."

The Harbor Patrol said in bewilderment, "What on earth has this to do with us? He arrived by *land*, didn't he?".

Eventually the matter filtered (but the day was not out before filtering amounted to roosting) down to that poor recipient of all woes, from the arrest of the local drunk up to the unveiling of murder —the matter landed in the laps of the police.

Next door to the Immigration Office, behind the big blue-glass lantern that said "Police," nested the headquarters of law and order on the Rock. And there the Chief of Police glared down at a paper that comprised a contradiction in terminology—a sort of formal suggestion.

It was a by-the-way order, with no firm statement of what was to be accomplished, to the effect that the police would do well to "investigate" the activities of one Percy Elliott who had entered Gibraltar that day by land (which meant from Spain, through the town of La Linea de la Conception), "who is believed to be the notorious Alec Haupt, free-lance espionage agent and saboteur."

"Since when," the Chief bellowed, "are the police expected to concern themselves with spies?"

Despite an imposing rotundity and a magnificent guardsman's mustache, he was normally a very quiet man, and so his shouts were positively awe-inspiring. "Saboteurs? Interpol? Espionage? Two-C? When Two-C is under way we shall be overburdened with traffic, with noise, with drunken sailors, with silly parades. With fights resulting from supernationalism among an international force. Isn't that *enough* for the police to cope with? And why"—he yelled at Alistair Mandatta, who had foolishly chosen that moment to enter the office— "why do they call it Two-C? Call it an exercise, for God's sake. Call it a Navy field day. Call it a nonsense, call it a nuisance—but stop calling it Two-C!"

"Yes, sir," Alistair agreed.

The Chief focused on Alistair, who was one of his very few detectives. "You," he said, "read this."

Alistair read and then raised his sparse eyebrows. He said, "Yes, sir?"

"Take over," said his Chief, an unusual note of sadism in his voice.

"Take— Yes, sir. Presumably" —Alistair made a logical deduction, his normal line of thought and action until the advent of Alec Haupt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—"presumably they expect sabotage? And I am to prevent it?"

"Ha!" said his Chief, thus definitively setting Alistair on his course.

As mentioned, Alistair had always been logical—a valuable characteristic in any man, and invaluable in a policeman. True, the very lack of that worthy quality often makes the genius—as with the artist who scorns the landscape and paints the atmosphere—but such genius had not until that time been required of Alistair. So he began his investigation in a way that might have been called flat-footed.

Where was this Mr. Percy Elliott?

Alistair started a personal canvass of the Rock's five hotels. On his third stop, at the Barbary Inn, he was told that Mr. Percy Elliott, Australian, was in residence.

"What gives?" the day clerk asked. (He really said, "*Que passa?*" but the net effect is the same.) "This morning Tom Nicola of Immigration came round for a look at the police card and now you—? The passport control card has gone to Police Headquarters. You could have looked at it there."

"Preferred to take the walk," Alistair said. In reality, he had been afraid the card might be late. "What's he like, this Elliott?"

"Like anybody. Not young, not old, not tall, not short."

"Sounds more like nobody."

"Well, he's got this funny accent. Advanced Cockney-ism."

Alistair smiled obligingly. "In now?" he asked.

"Room Four Twenty-three. Unless he's gone out the window."

Alistair smiled again and settled on the wooden bench that faced the desk in the lobby.

A half hour later the desk clerk winked. Alistair's sparse eyebrows went up, the clerk's chin came decisively down, and Alistair's rear rose from the hard bench.

The man he followed seemed, at a quick glance, just as average as the desk clerk had said. Too average, Alistair thought, without definition.

They paraded, undeviatingly, to The Conch, a popular bar—popular, that is, in the late evening and during the night hours. At that moment it was empty, except for Mr. Elliott and Alistair. But Elliott did not appear to notice Alistair. Mr. Elliott drank whiskey, and Alistair, at the far end of the bar, drank Coca-Cola.

Percy Elliott, in the one quick glimpse that Alistair permitted himself, looked extremely ordinary, but after an afternoon of quick glimpses Alistair decided he was a fake. Instead of the 47 he claimed on the police card, he was probably sixty-ish. His hair was possibly dyed and his hairline had been changed. Before the alteration this man had had a pronounced widow's peak. And perhaps his ears were pasted back a bit.

Also, the eyes—a feature that at one time had been considered unchangeable—had been equipped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with contact lenses. Alistair was sure he had caught a reflection from the edge of the round bit of glass; but far more revealing was their color—a strong shade of blue. People of this man's age did not retain that young unfaded color in their sixties.

Eyes, Alistair mused, were still the one feature that could not *really* be changed. This fellow's were cold, calculating, unwinking, and, despite the contact lenses, a highly distinguishing feature.

As Alistair came to this conclusion, Percy Elliott called out to the bartender, "Where's the loo?"

He then followed directions, descending downward from the main room of The Conch, already considerably below ground, even farther into the bowels of the Rock.

He made the descent to the Men's Room no less than five times in the next hour and a quarter.

That night Alistair read the report he had requested: the story of the Life and Times of Alec Haupt. It read like an unsellable spy story —all fact, no fiction, and much too incredible to be believable.

There was no one, it seemed, that Haupt not worked for; no crime he had not committed; nowhere he had not been. But there was no sex in the story, and not much suspense. Haupt, under whatever name, had at first managed his work without even being seen. Bit by bit, inevitably, he became known. He had then changed only in degree: he became even more painstaking. He was a planner, no detail ever being too small for his attention. He was also a master at indirection—and misdirection.

Alistair looked at the photograph (admittedly circa 1941) without interest: a blurred, enlarged, hurried shot, it could have been anyone. But he read the man's description with considerable interest, noting that Haupt's eyes were "faded blue-gray" and "often described as coldly penetrating." Haupt was otherwise described by the words "ordinary, undistinguished," and other synonyms and redundancies. His hair, as recalled in an eyewitness account of 1950 was "pepper and salt, coming to a point in the middle of the forehead." By 1956, nature had been taking its sad course: "His hair has apparently receded above the temples but not over the middle. As a result he has an exaggerated widow's peak. It looks Mephistophelean, and is his only distinctive feature."

Was, Alistair supplied mentally. But he felt satisfied that he was not wasting time. Everyone had seemed so sure this was Alec Haupt, if only for the excellent reason that Interpol said so. Now he, Alistair Mandatto, was equally sure.

Three days after the arrival of the so-called Australian theoretically named Elliott, Alistair tread softly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the office of his superior. He said, "A report, sir."

His Chief eyed him—in so far as it was possible to see more than the Gibraltarian mustache—and said, "Is it interesting? Frankly, Mandatto, I'm anxious to forget this Haupt, especially as it is occurring to me that everyone who dumped him on me did so with the hope that I would have the tact either to report him as forgettable or render him so."

"Interesting? That I don't know. The man's activities are so ordinary as to be a trifle unusual." It was the first of his backward-thinking negatives, and small essay though it was, it brought immediate response from his Chief.

"Fancy talk," that gentleman snapped. "Fancy thinking. Just report, if you must."

"Yes, sir. The man Elliott does five things: he walks extensively, he drinks whiskey—not extensively but lengthily. That is, he lingers over a glass, if you know what I mean."

"My cousin runs The Bluebell. Such types are the ruination of his business, so I know what you mean. And?"

"The third—ah—activity"—Alistair paused and then said in a rush—"he goes to the bathroom."

"I *beg* your pardon?"

"I mean, in The Conch, which is where he does his slow whiskey drinking. He hasn't a weak bladder, because he can walk twenty miles—and does, sadly for my feet and shoes—and never so much as pause. But in The Conch, he goes as often as every fifteen minutes."

Alistair paused—as if waiting for the Chief to comment. When the Chief merely blinked, but said nothing, the detective went on, "Four, he has taken to wearing a red carnation—"

The Chief now became articulate. "Toilets? Carnations? Really, Mandatto—"

"I take the carnation to be for the purpose of identification, sir. And five—the real development—for the last twenty-four hours he has been accepting parcels. They disappear into his clothing. I don't know what happens to them, but I suspect the Men's Room in The Conch."

"'Accepting parcels'? What the devil—"

"Men—ah—sidle up to him—in a rather obvious manner, really—and give him small parcels. Various shapes, various sizes. They—"

"*What* men?"

"I was coming to that, sir. They appear to be Spaniards—day workers from over the line."

"Ah!" A buck had finally appeared for the passing. "Go next door. Tell Immigration. Stop this thing. Nip it."

"Yes, sir. Indicated. But . . ."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Well, none of our business, of course, but how is Immigration going to stop it? These chaps look

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like all other over-the-border workers, of which there are some twenty thousand a day. Customs and Immigration don't have sufficient men to search them all, and it would be silly, anyway. As for parcels, ninety per cent of the daytime entrants carry their lunch—small newspaper packets and brown-paper parcels exactly like the ones Mr. Elliott has been accepting. The Spanish worker can't afford the prices here, so he brings his own lunch, naturally—"

"Naturally," the Chief interrupted coldly. "If we may go back to the beginning of that oration you just delivered, it is, as you said, none of our business. Report to Immigration."

"Yes, sir."

Immigration listened coldly, and then repeated almost word for word Alistair's "oration."

"And so," said the man in the glass compartment, "what would you suggest? An intense daily search of each worker?"

"No, sir. I was just reporting."

"Then *I* shall make a suggestion. Arrest one of these parcel deliverers. Pull a couple in for questioning. Accuse 'em of walking on the grass."

"It's January, sir."

"Now you're outraging the Tourist Bureau and every merchant on Main Street. Accuse 'em of walking on the grass that is advertised as being present."

"We'll see, sir."

Alistair was not easily annoyed, but it was a bit too much to have Immigration telling him how to conduct police business. He had of course given thought to questioning one of the sidler-uppers, but he hadn't wanted to alert Mr. Elliott.

Alert Mr. Elliott? It came to Alistair with force that Mr. Elliott must know Alistair as well as Alistair knew Mr. Elliott. Why should there be two men who visited the Men's Room in The Conch after nearly every sip (since Alistair naturally investigated after each of Mr. Elliott's visits), and never seemed to visit Men's Rooms anywhere else?

The realization that Mr. Elliott must be thoroughly aware of him made Alistair indefinably nervous.

Others were getting nervous, too. Consciences were pricking, perhaps as a result of the pointed, unarguable fact of the calendar. Every morning a page was torn raspingly off. Every day brought closer the advent of Two-C.

The fact of Alec Haupt, alias Percy Elliott, had been passed like a chip in a galloping poker game—but it hadn't erased him. He was there, on the Rock, and his presence was twisting in all consciences, rubbing against the grain of all nerves.

Two-C was near; Haupt was nearer; what was happening?

The question came at the Chief of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Police all at once from every direction. The head of Navy Security just happened to drop into Police Headquarters at the same time that a top representative of Government House wandered by. Their air of nonchalant happenstance was a little odd in view of the fact that neither of the gentlemen had ever passed beneath the blue lantern before.

Immigration chose the same moment to leave the sanctuary of his glass enclosure and make the forty-foot trip to the Chief of Police's office. The Colonel of the Regiment dropped in. And, unhappily, Alistair came mousily along to report. He took one shocked look and started to inch away, but the Chief said sharply, "Don't go, Alistair." To the rest of the assembly, he said, "Haupt, gentlemen?"

Into the small silence the military dropped a game, bluffly honest word: "Haupt," said the Colonel.

Immigration said, "I have something concrete on the subject. Well, not concrete exactly, but, well . . . We have started a search of the Spanish day workers. We have given hours of labor and are reaping dozens of complaints, and it's all for nothing. So far nothing suspicious. But it's a matter of thousands of drops in an outsized keg of beer, of course. On the other hand, *you* are at the other end of the funnel. They have already been funneled for *you*."

"*What's* been *what* for me? What are we talking about?" The Chief of Police looked understandably irritated.

"You actually see these working chappies who deliver these confounded 'parcels.' The 'you' is, of course, impersonal. By 'you' I mean—"

"Alistair!" the Chief said. All the penetrating eyes turned on Alistair, whose crablike shuffle had taken him as near the door as possible.

He said, "Yes, sir. I had just come to report, sir."

"What parcels?" asked Navy Security.

A rehash was delivered.

"Um," said Navy Security, and turned on Alistair. "Report," he said.

"Yes, sir. I picked up two of these parcel deliverers. That is, I got them aside. They told the same story. They were approached on the other side—one in La Linea, the other in Algeciras—were given a parcel and told to deliver it to the gentleman who wore a red carnation. One was to make delivery at nine o'clock in front of the Barbary Inn. Other was told to make delivery at noon twenty paces down from The Conch. That's all they knew."

"Nonsense," Immigration snapped. "They also knew it was illegal. They should be arrested."

"To what purpose?" Navy's lifted eyebrow was entirely polite.

"What reason did they have for so outraging our hospitality?" Government House asked in outraged social tones.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One thousand pesetas each," Alistair told him.

"One thousand reasons each," the Navy murmured.

"And what was in the parcels?"

"They didn't know." Alistair hesitated and then dared an opinion: "They said they didn't know, and I believed the whole story, because of their types and because the details were substantially the same."

"Who gave them the parcels?" the Regiment demanded.

"There alone the stories differed. One received his from a lady—English, he thought. The other got his from a man—a foreigner, he said, and from what he added I concluded it might have been a Frenchman."

"That," the Navy said seriously, "is bad. Implies organization."

"And so," the Chief of Police said, "someone must do something, no?"

The "someone" hung in the air.

Then, "Yes," Government House said crisply. "We must all move together. Chief, you arrest this Elliott. We shall give you every possible authority."

"Charge?" the Chief asked.

"Suspicion. Suspicion of—oh, to hell with it. We shall invent a charge called 'Suspicion.' Immigration, you get on to your friends on the other side. See what you can get them to do in the way of picking up the consigners of these parcels."

"Subject of the charge will cause no problem at all over there," Immigration said. "They have millions of charges lying about loose—things like 'Endangering the State.' But I suspect these consigners are going to be hard to get hold of in order to charge."

"Try, anyway," the Regiment said. "And The Conch Bar. We'll inspect the cellars, the toilets. If that isn't enough, we'll tear the place apart."

"Are those cellars anywhere near the Casemates?" Immigration asked, in a sort of mumble.

Navy fixed him with an icy eye. "I don't happen to have with me," he drawled, "a plan of our bombproof shelters, of our masonry installations, of our cannon emplacements, of galleries or chambers or embrasures." He kept the icy eye on Immigration, who wilted; Immigration knew damn well that the fortifications of the Rock were not his business.

Wilting accomplished, the Navy softened: "But no, I should say that The Conch was miles from anything. And no one has suggested that Haupt has been tunneling—?"

Navy raised a very English eyebrow at Alistair, who said, "No, sir. He just goes to the l— the toilet. I mean, the time element suggests . . . just long enough to—"

"Indeed. Well, then." Navy sat back and crossed his knees.

The Chief of Police uncrossed his knees. "The owner of The Conch is the uncle of my wife. Not, of course, that that has anything to do with it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but the gentleman in question is, ah, very fiery. He will not take an invasion lightly."

"This is not the time for *individualismo*," the Navy, an English individualist to his fingertips, said with near distaste.

"Quite," said Government House. "We'll have to invent another law, or something. The time for action has come, and The Conch Bar seems the hub. Tear it apart—that is the natural and inevitable action."

"*De acuerdo*," the Chief of Police said, "we'll all work together." He nodded firmly.

"But," Alistair said, to his never-dying surprise, "we aren't *all* here."

Eyes sought the door. "I beg your pardon?" the Navy said politely.

"The Harbor Patrol, sir. They aren't here."

"Alistair," the Chief said, "what are you talking about?"

"Mr. Elliott. You see, he's so obvious."

The Chief hesitated, mentally adding up the pros and cons in the record of Alistair's twelve years' service. The pros won by a surprising margin. He said, "All right, Mandatto, explain yourself."

Besides being the last thing in the world Alastair wanted to do, it was not an easy task. He had not yet sorted and defined, and so was forced to his normal incoherence. "This Mr. Elliott, sir—"

"Please call him Elliott. Or Haupt."

"Yes, sir. Well, this Elliott—and he *is* Haupt; I satisfied myself as to that." The Navy uncrossed his knees and looked at Alstair thoughtfully. "He's always had a reputation for thoroughness and indirectness. And now here, he's not being neither. If you see—? We're all assuming—I think?—that he's going to try to blow up The Conch, and with it our fortifications. But we have just been assured that he's nowhere near anything important. Not very efficient, is it?

"And he can't be working with something atomic, something that would have far-reaching effects, because he has no scientific knowledge—I checked into that thoroughly. Them atomic things, they require know-how; Mr.—this Elliott is not even a tinkerer. Also, why blow up just the Rock? Two-C will take place, of course, in the Harbour."

He paused, found he had everyone's unblinking attention, and continued a little more strongly, "Now, then, there's the matter of his walks. He's been to the Dockyards a dozen times." He added hastily, in response to the Navy's jerk, "Couldn't get in, of course; didn't even try. Just lounged around and sort of peeked. And he's been up and down the sides of the Rock like—like a goat. Peering into tunnels—those that aren't forbidden. Poking around in the caves.

"Also, he's been outside Government House a lot, watching them change the guard. He's inspected the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

airfield as if he intended to build one, or something. He has been"—Alastair searched for a word, found one, and delivered it earnestly, "—obvious. Very obvious. But in this, the greatest port in the world" —Alistair swelled slightly—"where *hasn't* he gone? Why, gentlemen, he hasn't gone near the Harbour. Not once."

"One can't. Not without a reason or a pass," Government House said.

"Yes, sir, but he couldn't get into the Dockyards, either, and still he spent time peeking through the arch. He didn't even go near the Harbour gates. When he was up on the Rock, he didn't use field glasses to look down at the Harbour. He took a room in Barbary and from that hotel there is no view at all. He could have gone to the Victoria. From there he would have a lovely view, Harbour included. But Mr. Elliott is very, very *un*interested in the Harbour. And," Alistair repeated, "where will Two-C take place? In the Harbour, of course. All over it."

The silence continued. Into it Alistair nervously dropped one last thought: "And *if* there's someone in the Harbour, they could really *be* technicians. And if they blew up the Harbour at the right moment, they'd not only get Two-C but the Rock as well. That is, their first explosion would—would—"

"Activate all the others," the Navy murmured.

"Yes, sir."

The Navy continued in a murmur, speaking as if to himself: "There would go the Western Alliance, on the one hand, and our Rock on the other. What would happen then? Another port needs must become the hub, the command post. Algeciras, not fortifiable like Gibraltar, could be taken. And *then*, perhaps, fortified. Or Punta Carnero? Tangiers? Or Tarifa. The Isle de Tarifa? No, Ceuta!—*that* would be it. Ceuta, the African portal. We must check the activity in Ceuta. We must see, in regard to Two-C —"

(At that point I couldn't stand it any longer. "What," I demanded of Alistair, "what in the name of heaven was—is?—Two-C?"

"Ah-h-h." He looked in my direction, focused hard, and said, "Well, as far as I can explain, the way to put it—it was the code name for the visit of a concentration of NATO ships. Fifty-three of them arrived here at the same time. Different nations, you know, but all consigned to NATO. They were playing games, if you follow me. War games? Exercise, sort of."

"Fifty-three, " I repeated happily. "Do go *on*.")

The gentleman from Government House interrupted the Navy gentleman's soliloquy. "Stuff and nonsense," he said. "—No offense intended. We are not playing tiddlywinks, and neither is this fellow Haupt. We must investigate the ground under The Conch."

The Navy examined him in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absent-minded vacancy. Then he nodded. "Quite agree. My reason is different—I simply feel that Haupt should get the attention he is so obviously wooing—but I do agree. Can your men take care of that? Dig around a bit?"

"Dig around a bit" was too much for Government House. He left in a huff, but not before he was solidly committed to making a thorough nuisance of himself to the proprietor of The Conch, and—hopefully—to Percy Elliott. The Regiment agreed to put a large contingent at his disposal.

The gentleman from Government House was replaced, with astonishing speed, by the Harbourmaster, who responded with what could easily have been termed alacrity to a request for his presence as framed by the Chief of Police, the Head of Immigration, the Chief of Naval Security, and a Colonel of the Garrison.

But the Harbourmaster hadn't been present long enough to sit down before he said, "Haupt again! What, as we asked before, can that possibly have to do with us?"

Succinctly and a trifle dryly, Navy Security explained.

The Harbourmaster sat down abruptly. He had turned a revolting shade of mauve-gray, which sat oddly under his ruddy tan and made him look putrefied. He said, between deep breaths, "But the gates are manned. Carefully. We do not permit slackness. There are guardposts—you gentlemen realize how many guardposts there are. The main one. The one on this side of the viaduct. Another gate on the north mole, which no one can enter except on known business or if they are aboard a yacht—"

The Navy interrupted. "Take it easy," he said gently. "We know how very well the Harbour is guarded, of course." His eye caught Alistair's and he said, "Yes? Speak up."

"Well, sir, since we do know how very well guarded *entry* to the Harbour by land is—how about *exit?*"

The Harbourmaster looked around to find Alistair, and then said, "Huh?"

"Anyone can come in on a yacht, sir, can't he? And then—well, we're a gentlemanly country, no? Yachtsmen . . . And so they don't *have* to pass the gates and all those posts and the guardhouses, do they?"

The Harbourmaster grabbed the Chief's telephone without asking permission. He barked for several minutes, then hung up and wiped his putrefied forehead. "Only a half dozen yachts are in. My people will call back to confirm nationalities and such, but I can give you a fairly accurate rundown myself." He ticked his fingers. "One, a smallish sloop—thirty-six overall, I should say. Americans. Man and wife. This couple have the seasonal madness. Gib to the Canaries. Canaries to Barbados, or Bermuda, or Miami, or the Virgins. The big idea

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is to cross the Atlantic. There are three of those. The Americans, another—a Belgian couple, I believe—and a third . . ."

He paused, then he said, "Also man and wife. Swedish flag, biggish boat, about fifty feet, I'd say. A fourth is—"

The Navy said, "Pardon. What made you pause over the Swedish one?"

"Huh? Well, I've never seen him—only the lady, bicycling to market, Pretty, blonde girl. And the boat itself. Old, big and beamy—*very* big."

The Navy looked bewildered by the emphasis and the Harbourmaster said, "Not being clear, am I? Big craft for two people, that's what I mean. But maybe there are more than two aboard. Office will call back. Where was I? Oh, yes. Sir John Nettle's motor launch is in, en route up the coast to winter in Alicante. He's not aboard; just a skeleton crew. The fifth is a tiny thing with six young men aboard. All British, I think. All with beards. Also en route to Canaries." He sat back.

"And the sixth?" the Chief asked.

"Sixth? Oh, sixth craft. The *Francesca*. Out of the running. And under arrest. She's the French launch we've been reading about. Being sued in our Supreme Court. Worth about fifty thousand pounds. Sea-going affair. Fourteen thousand pounds owed. Met the owner myself. Nice chap. Got caught in the Algerian thing. Was a millionaire, big building construction in Algiers. Lost it all, of course. Now the Germans who built his ship are suing for the remainder due them—fourteen thousand, as I said.

"Owner had been in Ceuta and he beat it across the minute he heard that the Germans were going to take action. Told me that in Spain he might have been jailed—anything. One never quite knows the law there, or which law will be considered applicable. Being here is going to cost him a pretty penny, court costs alone now running to about three hundred quid a week, and it's a matter of six weeks already. And he had to be towed over—his Diesels are shot, need expensive repair. But he says it's all worth it just be under the protection of the British flag."

Everyone in the room quite understood the sentiment.

The phone rang. The Chief answered, then held out the receiver to the Harbourmaster, who said, "Yes? Yes. Yes? *What?* Well, *how* did he get in? What do you mean. 'He's not in?' Oh, I see. There are others? *No?* And she? . . . I see, I see. All right for the moment."

He hung up and turned. "Gentlemen," he said, "the biggish ketch flying the Swedish flag is owned by the lady I saw on the bicycle. She is Swedish. Her husband, the registered captain, is *stateless*."

There was a horrified silence.

Then, "Impossible," Immigration

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said firmly. "Stateless persons are not permitted on the Rock—not, at least, without a special, short-term visa, and no such visa has been issued so far this year."

"Exactly what I was about to say to my assistant, but he pointed out that international law, as well as the age-old law of the sea, says you cannot refuse refuge to any *vessel*. Further, the man, the captain of this yacht, has *not* been permitted into Gibraltar. He is *confined* to the *Harbour*."

"Where else would he want to be?" Alistair murmured.

The next day—three days before Two-C was to arrive in toto—brought the first NATO arrivals: four enormous ships—two Dutch, one German, one British. The Chief of Police's worries increased in proportion to the number of sailors ashore, as did the Customs', Immigration's—everyone's, for that matter, except the merchants on Main Street who, when you came to think of it, were the *other* reason for the happy existence of Gibraltar.

Navies or no navies, a lengthy meeting was held in the Chief of Police's office.

The only newcomer was a robust blonde beauty of about twenty-five. She was near tears, but too plucky to give in. Still, her singsong English was occasionally gulped to incomprehensibility. No matter; her story was clear enough.

"*He* says," she repeated for the dozenth time, "that if he can't put foot on your land, neither can you put foot on his. He says that ship is his country, all the country he has, and no one is going to step there if he doesn't wish it."

"But, madam," the Navy said softly, "as the owner you can *direct* your captain—"

"Since you are in port and no question of navigation or safety enters," the Harbourmaster elaborated with a nice attention to a sailor's rights, "you as owner may certainly direct him to stand aside."

"He's my *husband*," the young lady wailed. A long blonde curl fell fetchingly over her eye. "I can't direct my *husband*!"

Every heart in the room warmed to her. Such, alas, was not always the feminine attitude. This was how marriage should be.

Alistair could stand it no longer. He whispered, in just barely an audible voice, into the Regiment's ear, "But, sir, why don't they just board? Surely Customs, at least, has the right—"

"Right?" Regiment snorted. " 'smatter of might. Gentleman has a Mauser. Beautiful piece of artillery. Gleaming blue with oil. He has the air of an expert marksman. He sits on the cabin roof, on a nice red cushion, with the rifle on his lap, safety catch off. His wife brings his meals up, cuts everything for him, and he eats with one eye. As it were."

"What about the nights?" Then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alistair added at once, "Oh." At nights, he had remembered, the harbors of Gibraltar are slightly brighter than during the day, being powerfully illuminated by amber lights, fifty feet apart, each double, each equipped with a reflector. No one gets away with anything in Gibraltar at night—including the boarding of any yacht whose owner is both opposed and armed.

"What is your husband's nationality?" Immigration asked.

"He's stateless," wailed the young woman.

"Yes, but originally?"

"Russian."

A gasp went through the room, and the young woman reacted to it with unexpected fury. "You're all so *silly!*" she said. "*So silly.* Isn't he more patriotic than you? He had to give up his country, didn't he? Don't you *see?*"

Eventually, the young lady was permitted to depart, all hands standing.

"Well," the Harbourmaster said, "all yachts were being asked to leave tomorrow. To make room in the pens, you know. Instead we'll ask them to leave this afternoon."

"But will he put down his arms and sail?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. His objection seems to be that he does not wish to be treated differently from the others. *All* yachts *must* leave."

"How was he treat differently so far?"

"In the matter of the search."

Alistair blurted, "But weren't they *all* searched?"

"Oh, quite," the Harbourmaster said. "Certainly. But not with the same, ah, intensity, you know. He apparently noticed the difference of approach . . ." He shrugged helplessly.

"So he, and whatever he's got on that boat, will get away. Scot-free?" The Chief looked outraged.

"Well," the Navy said soothingly, "the paramount idea is the security of Two-C. And, of course, Gibraltar. We must keep the target clearly before us, gentlemen."

Like the stateless gentleman, Alistair thought.

"And anyway," the Harbourmaster said, "he'll be picked up at the next port of call and searched. Thoroughly. I'll see to that. There are certain understandings . . ."

Everyone nodded.

Except Alistair. He looked more thoughtful than before.

Alistair spent the afternoon watching operations in, around, and under The Conch.

The proprietor, who spoke no English but had an astonishing command of Spanish and archaic Italian, was venting his wrath both on the troops that had swarmed over him as if his were an anthill—except, of course, that his was an anthole. Since the troops were Gibraltarian they understood every word, naturally. It did not make for kindly feelings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alistair had company. Mr. Elliott, too, was an interested watcher. I wonder when he'll go, Alistair thought—and then he examined the thought carefully.

By the next morning 17 more ships had arrived, and they were now coming in at the rate of three per hour. Despite the seriousness of the maneuver, there was an inevitable gaiety abroad. The harbor was a solid, frightening mass of battleship-gray, but the grimness was relieved by the bunting that every ship sported from stem to stern. The signal flags waved gaily in the light breeze and the gun emplacements glittered in the sun, lending brilliance to the drabness of their hosts. Gun salutes roared without cessation.

The town rivaled the harbor in noise, color, and excitement. The narrow streets were choked with uniforms, the girls were in even fuller panoply, the merchants were beaming, and the motorists were cursing. The air was alive with girlish shrieks, with a Babeling shower of tongues, with motorists' horns (strictly forbidden, and the motorists usually obeyed to the edge of disaster, but there was a point at which . . .), with policemen's whistles (Gibraltarian Bobbies are even nicer than the English version, being warmly Latin to begin with, as well as the gracious custodians of a tourist spot, but there is a point at which . . .)

Alistair felt that his was the only sour face on the Rock, and it grew more sour by the minute. Forgetting battleship-gray and gun emplacements, even the uniform reminded him of war; the girls seemed to him—a Gibraltarian, and a shy and wistful bachelor—to be traitors; the merchants seemed like vultures.

Reminded, he climbed high, up above the Harbour, up near the Moorish castle, and took out an ancient, tenderly curried spyglass. With it he surveyed the Harbour.

Then he saw and hailed Tony Mandatto, his third cousin once removed, who was happily piloting his hack back from his fourth visit that morning (twenty-five shillings the trip) to the neighborhood of the Barbary apes, a tourists' "must." Alistair rode silently beside the bubbling Tony, grunting a single word —"*Gracias*"—as they came down to Main Street.

Then he trudged again, three streets up, to watch the fracas at The Conch. The area was roped off, and inside, the activity had increased to frenzy point. Also increased was the frenzy of the Chief's wife's uncle, the proprietor. Even Alistair, a man little given to blasphemy, was impressed. It occurred to him The Conch was not only being unsystematically torn apart, but that, in addition, the income to be gathered from this collection of navies could never be made up. He felt sympathy. He looked around for his usual mate-in-watching—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and discovered that Mr. Elliott was not there.

His pace, toward the Barbary Inn, was rapid.

"Checked out," the day clerk said. "Early this morning. In time to get the first bus to La Linea. What was it about, huh? Give me the lowdown." ("*Informes confidenciales*," was what he said, but the net effect was the same.)

"Sure," Alistair told him. "All over now, so you might as well know. Narcotics. He had four ounces of pure heroin up in his room—your room, mate."

"No!" the day clerk gasped.

"Oh, yes." Alistair nodded firmly and departed.

The Chief of Police was not in his office. "Government House, I think," the officer at the desk told him.

Alistair walked up Irish Town, cut through the parking lot in front of City Hall, and then was subjected to uniforms, flowers, and girls for the whole weary length of Main Street.

He waited in a dense mob in front of Government House. The others were waiting for the changing of the guard. Alistair decided that the whole world was crazy. The changing of the guard consisted of two undersized soldiers marching smartly across the street and barking at another soldier, who barked back, fell out, and then marched back across the street with one of the first two. "Cute," he had once heard an American lady say.

Because of the crowd he had trouble getting to the Chief when that harassed-looking man did puff out. Alistair caught his sleeve just as the Chief was about to enter his car. The Chief glared at him and said, "Yes, *yes?*"

Alistair considered, his mustache working in and out with anxiety, and just as he had screwed it to the point of permitting the exit of "*Nada, señor jefe, nada*," the Chief completed his mental review of Alistair's record. He said more encouragingly, "Yes, Mandatto?"

Thoroughly rattled, Alistair said, "The rat has run."

In Spanish, the proverb made compelling sense. To both of them it brought a vivid picture of Haupt scrambling down the lines just before the ship sank—or in this case, just before all the ships blew up, and their beloved Rock with them.

The Chief said, "Get in here with me."

They climbed into the comparative quiet of the back seat where they sat in silence for a minute. Then the Chief said, "It will make no difference, you realize? Immigration will pick him up at La Linea."

"He was very careful to mention La Linea and to leave in time to catch the first bus. So he was probably taking the eight-fifteen plane. A man of indirection."

"Yes, Mandatto, but Immigration isn't sleeping. They'll catch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him there, too, even with the other passport he'll have, even with a change of appearance. Don't you worry about that."

"Not that, sir. There's something more."

And then, in a mumble, with his usual incoherence, Alistair unburdened himself. When the uneven trickle ran out he was silent, perched on the edge of the upholstery, not quite cringing, merely awaiting the worst.

It didn't come. "I—see," the Chief said. "How amazingly backwards. Quite remarkable . . . Well, now, the Harbourmaster, I think. Don't you?"

"Perhaps Navy Security first, sir? They might have a demolition man."

"Right."

The Harbourmaster was perhaps the busiest of all the busy ones on the Rock that day. He spared them a brief nod, and then ran his words together as quickly as possible. "Good morning, gentlemen. How are things at The Conch?"

"Blown up," the Chief said, so giving him the three-minute-old news.

"Ah?" The Harbourmaster spared time for a relieved grin. "And now you are checking here? Quite proper, yes, yes. All yachts have been dispatched."

"Including the Stateless One?" the Navy murmured.

"Yes, *yes*. All's well. And now if you'll excuse me—"

"And the *Francesca*?"

"The Francesca? Of course not. The Court wouldn't permit it, you know. Her Diesels are out of repair, anyway. So we've just tucked her away—as far as possible out of the way."

"In the middle of the pens?" the Navy inquired. "Number Three?"

"Right. The only spot that might be a little shallow for the others. Spot is due for dredging. Good place for her, you see. Wouldn't put anything of this"—he waved out his window at the mighty exhibition of displacement and power—"nothing of the size of *those* would be safe in that spot."

"Ah. Safe." The Navy managed to convey a great deal of dryness in two syllables.

The dryness got through the Harbormaster's preoccupation. Half resenting its Englishness, half fearing something in the air, he said, "What is it? Since The Conch blew up . . . ?"

"Firecrackers" the Chief told him. "Beautifully hidden, beautifully placed, beautifully chosen. Too bad it's not nighttime, as it probably would have been if the troops had not messed about. The diversionary tactics may not—we pray—succeed as such, but it would at least have been a thing of beauty."

"Diversionary," the Harbormaster repeated faintly.

The Chief of Police said gently,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Have you ever tried the Diesels on the *Francesca*, Vincente?"

"Tried—? Of course not. It's a private yacht. That is, it's in the custody of the courts, but . . ." He sat down.

"We're going to board her, Vincente. Would you care to come along?"

"All this . . ." The Harbormaster's wave died in mid-Strait. "All this"—by which he meant all that tonnage—had suddenly become unimportant, or important in a different way. Mooring them was not nearly as vital as keeping them out of midair.

During the brief ride toward the north mole, the usual resting place for yachts and currently the sanctuary of the *Francesca* and about 150,000 tons of NATO armament, the Harbourmaster said, "And these two gentlemen?"

"Oh, so sorry." The Navy was all social regret. He introduced the two strangers: the big one was a Diesel expert, the little one a demolition man.

The daintily named *Francesca* was stolid, solid, and steel. Even her decks were steel. Her superstructure doors were fitted like a submarine's; they locked to watertightness, and were obviously escapeproof. She was luxuriously fitted in the interior, but to Alistair the clanging doors set the keynote: she was grimly efficient.

Unlike the Swedish yacht, they experienced no difficulty in boarding the *Francesca*. She was, in fact, totally deserted.

"Is she always left alone?" the Navy asked the officer they had picked up at the last guardhouse.

"Oh, no, sir. Usually the owner is aboard. And there are always at least two or three crew members. They change a lot. This morning they kept coming and going, and there were so many others coming and going . . ." He looked guilty and helpless.

"Quite understand," the Navy said, and Alistair, for one, thought it was most undesirable. All that coming and going, and the few familiar faces popping in and out.

"It confirms," the Chief murmured, and he repeated Alistair's proverb about deserting rats. Rather to his surprise, Navy Security understood.

"Won't get far, I shouldn't think," Navy commented, and to the demolition man he said sharply, "Yes? Anything?"

"Yes, *sir!*" The man's small face was white. "This whole thing is radioactive. It's—radioactive!" He gulped. "It could blow up the—the world, practically. The placement is below a leaden keel—not quite enough to shelter it entirely, but far too much to lift easily. And frankly"—he gulped again— "I wouldn't want to lift it. That is, I wouldn't advise it. These things are —delicate, sir. *Delicate!*" he almost screamed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Navy said, "Don't faint. Get a grip. Sit down." He turned to the Diesel man. "Fixable?"

The Diesel man was legitimately Australian, an outgoing type, and apparently unimpressible. "Hell, yes," he said. "Nothing wrong with her, in fact. *Beautiful* pair of babies under our feet. Two hundred-and-fifty horsepower G.M.'s. Somebody's removed the injectors. It'll take about two minutes after we get replacements from the General Motors agents. Then she'll do an easy seventeen knots."

"No, no!" the demolition man squeaked. "Not *one* knot! No Diesels, no lights—don't even strike a *match*. No electricity. Don't blow your *nose*. Take off your *shoes*. Tippytoe, for God's sake! *Whisper!*" he added sibiliantly, and gulped for breath.

The Navy eyed him absently. "Um," he said. "Hadn't thought of that."

The Australian grinned. "Got a point, I'll betcha."

Navy turned to, of all people, Alistair. "Timed?" he murmured.

Alistair said, "I should think so, sir."

"Um." He looked at the totally demolished demolition expert. "Could this thing work on a time-bomb basis?"

"Certainly. Time . . . Oh, my God!"

"Relax," the Navy advised him absently.

The word brought a response —more response than anyone thought was left in the little man. "*Relax!*" he screamed, shuddered and dropped to a rasping whisper. "*Be* English. G'wan, *be* English! Stiffen your lip and all that. It's only because you don't understand. This thing is worse than Hiroshima and Nagasaki *combined!* Can you get your English mind around *that?*"

The Navy eyed him coolly and then said the Right Thing: "We are all British here, I think?" He waited for neither answer nor confirmation, but added into the air, "Tow her out, I suppose?"

That got him another response from the demolition man, although he had not been addressing him. "Oh, no," that one said. "*Not* me. Not *me*. That's beyond the call of —"

"Off," the Navy said. He waved as if at a fly, and the demolition expert took agile advantage of the suggestion. He scrambled along the deck and off in a matter of seconds. Then he kept going.

They watched him. Alistair said, "He really couldn't run far enough, could he?"

"Shouldn't think so," the Navy agreed. "Well, now, I can steer this thing. I'm not much on Diesels but since we can't use them—"

"I'm with you anyway," the Diesel man said. "Rarin' to go."

"You quite understand the danger in —"

"Oh, quite." It was friendly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mockery. He added, "Anyway, as our friend here points out, seems you really couldn't run far enough."

"Good. I think the two of us can manage. I'll take the *Francesca*, you take that auxiliary power launch." He eyed the handsome motorboat that was stowed forward.

"Nonsense," the Harbourmaster said. "Needs at least three, just aboard the *Francesca*. My duty, of course." He looked anxiously at the loaded port. "I'm sure my assistant can manage. As for the power launch—"

Alistair touched the Chief's sleeve. He said, "Sir?"

"Huh? Oh, Mandatto. What? Oh . . . Well, as you wish."

The Navy said to Alistair, "Good man. Glad to have you aboard. Now, let's hurry, don't you think? Is that power launch working?"

"No, no." The Harbourmaster looked shocked. "We'll permit no such chance. A pilot will tow you. Gently. The *Nelson*, one of my best. And they'll bring you back." His face added, I hope. He said hastily. "Now, where?"

They bent over charts.

The Atlantic, their first thought, was quickly ruled out. Tow against that current? And too far to travel. And suppose she blew up in the Strait? Also, oddly enough, in that area the Atlantic is shallower than the Mediterranean.

So it would be the Med. A deep spot lay right out in the channel, about midway between Europa Point at the tip of the Rock and Ceuta on the African side. At latitude 36°N, Longitude 5°18W, the Mediterranean is 492 fathoms deep.

"A fraction more than half a landmile," the Harbourmaster said. "Deep enough, you suppose?"

"Oh, no," the Navy said. "Should think not. I expect there's no place in the world really deep enough. But it's all we've got. And," he added, "only about five and a half miles out. That's about as far as I personally care to travel. Then we'll open the sea cocks and, if I may quote, tippytoe off."

The crew of the pilot *Nelson*, told to volunteer, unhappily obliged. Then, with all the rest of the pilots, police, and immigration boats running interference, and thus assuring her fathoms and fathoms of leeway, the *Francesca* was towed, ever so gently, out into the Bay.

They rode back in the moonlight, on a mild evening, on a calm sea, not cold, not tossed about, and feeling a bit silly. All was humdrum, anticlimactic. There they were in the little pilot boat, looking up at all those heroic monsters of the sea . . .

"But," Alistair said to me, "the next day there was a gigantic explosion at the stroke of noon. Terrible thing. Hit the—what are those gadgets they have to measure earthquakes and suchlike?"

"Seismographs?" I offered.

"That's it. Hit seismographs all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over the world. Russia has already accused NATO of underwater atomic fission. And we've had a mess of experts here all week, all fussing about radioactivity. They're considering closing the fish markets—or something. Dangerous, you know?" Alistair tried his focusing trick; he didn't manage to find my face, but he did succeed in registering intense seriousness.

"Yes, yes," I said. I was in a terrible hurry. "Well, if you'll excuse me. It's dark and I have to put in a call—"

"But wasn't I right to think backwards?" Alistair asked moistly. "It was *necessario*, *vérdad?* Forgive. My English, she fails when I get emotional."

Or drunk, I said, "Maybe it was a compliment, Alistair. Maybe the Chief admired your cleverness. After all, he's Gibraltarian like you, isn't he?"

"True." Alistair brightened. "That is indeed true, sir. Perhaps he did not intend the insult."

I left him on that note, murmuring with tearful hope into his beer.

I said, "George? Listen, George —"

"Look, Jimmy, I warn you, I'm going to kill you—at least, I'm going to tell this so-and-so of an operator what I think of *her*. I'm—"

"George, you asked me a question —what has Gibraltar got that Andorra hasn't got? Remember? Well, suppose there's an answer. And suppose the answer is *spies*. International spies. Public interested in *them?*"

"Suppose, George, I could give you a scoop on the fact that fifty-three NATO ships were almost blown up here, along with the Rock itself, less than a week ago. You know what that means? Forgetting the ships, you know what it would mean if there were no Gibraltar? The balance of world-power—"

"Stop asking me questions!" he bellowed. "Shut up and give!"

I gave. It took me about twenty expensive minutes to deliver a bare skeleton, but that was partly his fault; he kept saying, "Wait a minute till I get that down" and "How do you spell it?"

When I finally stopped, he seemed to be suffering from breathlessness. I'm a salesman; I just sat there and let him gasp. He finally said, "Brother!" In two reverent little syllables.

I said modestly, "Yeah."

"Okay. Start writing. Start *now*. We'll have to yank the issue that's already on the press. Why in God's name do I run a monthly?" he moaned. "Someone's sure to get his hot paws on this before I can get a single copy out. Okay, okay, not your concern. You write it. Tomorrow you get more of the facts—names, dates, people's names, ship's names—everything. You get—"

"I know, I know," I said soothingly. "And I'll cable it in."

"Cable? You out of your mind? You want to leak it? You want to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lose time? You phone, hear me? And quick."

"That girl at the switchboard—"

"Don't be smart. If anything occurs to me, I'll phone— No, I'll have to cable you because of the time difference. Okay, boy—go to work!"

I did. Just as he said, I wrote all night. Went to sleep at six, and his cable reached me at 8:30. I opened it with a smile, anticipating the flood of additional instructions and questions, and the possibility that dough would be mentioned.

The cable said:

ACCORDING TO FBI AND CIA NO ERIC HAUPT EXISTS NO CONCENTRATION OF NATO SHIPS HAS TAKEN PLACE IN GIBRALTAR LATELY AND THERE NEVER IN HISTORY HAS BEEN SUCH A TASK FORCE AS YOU DRUNKENLY REPORTED THERE HAS BEEN NO EXPLOSION ANYWHERE IN THE LAST WEEK AND NONE IN THAT NEIGHBORHOOD EVER IN HISTORY SEISMOGRAPHS OF THE WORLD ARE REMARKABLY EQUABLE UNLIKE ME GO EAT FISH GO EAT FISH THERE IS MUCH I COULD SAY IN ADDITION TO THAT BUT THE MEDIUM FORBIDS A WARNING HOWEVER STAY OUT OF THIS TOWN

It was unsigned. George, having spent a few bucks, was saving money.

I hung around the bar until two o'clock. By then I was hungry in spite of my headache, my heartburn, and my quivering nervous system. The bartender didn't speak English and I speak even less Spanish. But two o'clock brought a changing of the guard, and the new custodian of the bottles and glasses spoke English, if heavily accented.

"Alistair? Alistair Mandatto? Oh, sure. You was in here wit' heem yesterday? All afternoon?"

"All afternoon," I agreed grimly. "All the long day, which unforgettable day will put a large crimp in my next several years' income tax."

"Hah?"

"Nothing. Just—where is Mandatto now? Will he show up soon?"

"Show up—" He looked puzzled. "No, senor. Yesterday his day off. Today he work. Won't come at all. And may not come here for another year. He don't drink, Alistair. Yesterday very unusual. I shouldn't tell you—"

He looked around the bar as if a Haupt were lurking in every corner— "but . . . something very es-strange has been happening in Gibraltar. Nobody knows what—but something *internationale*, you comprehend? And *muy, muy*"—he gulped—" very, very *importante*. The whisper is that Alistair is great hero. So I thought maybe yesterday he got drunk to—to let down, you comprehend. To, to—"

"To get rid of the tension?"

"*Exactemente*. You see, he very cautious. Very proper British officer of the law. Discreet, you comprehend? So is hard to release himself. We Latins, British or not, we like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to talk a little, to brag—you comprehend? And there is poor Alistair, a hero and he can't tell nobody." He shook his head: "Sad, no?"

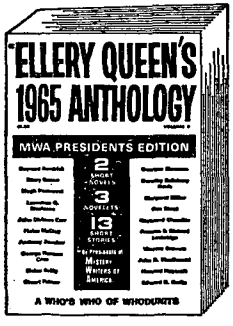
"Sad, yes. I'm awash." I paid my bar bill and left.

I've been remembering, here in my hotel room in Gibraltar, how Alistair replied to the hotel clerk (in the Barbary, but I've checked and I know now that it wasn't the Barbary; they really hadn't a notion of what I was talking about over there)—the hotel clerk who asked him about Haupt.

"Narcotics," Alistair had told him, and then added that bit of specific information which always tends to convince "Four ounces of pure heroin up in his room."

Now, taking that as my cue—if it wasn't the Harbour, what was it? The galleries? Or maybe the Dockyard? And what about Ceuta? Was that pure red herring, or could it have been a legitimate slip on Alistair's part?

—And I've had one more thought: Whatever crack the Chief of Police made that hurt Alistair's feelings, I don't think the Chief was taking him to task for thinking backwards, or sideways, or inside out. I have a suspicion that he *always* thinks like that, that Alistair is indirection's—and misdirection's—master.



For the best in mystery reading

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1965 ANTHOLOGY

$1 per copy

Buy your copy at your newsstand—or use coupon below

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY / 505 PARK AVENUE / NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

Please send me_____copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1965 ANTHOLOGY—Edition No. 8. I am enclosing $1 for each copy ($1.25 outside U.S.A.).

Name _____
(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *newest* DR. COFFEE story

Can a fully plotted short story be told in 2000 words? If you doubt it, reserve decision until you've read this newest short-short about Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist of Pasteur Hospital, Northbank, United States . . .

GOODBYE, STRANGER

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

DR. COFFEE LOOKED UP FROM his microscope and blinked at the dark, big-eared police detective who had draped one lean ham on a corner of his desk. He asked, "You say she was naked, Max?"

"Practically," said Lieutenant Max Ritter. "She had on a negligee, but if Salome's veils were made out of the same stuff, she'd have had to wear more than seven to hide anything."

The pathologist ran his long fingers through his sandy hair. "And she never saw the man before?"

"That's what she says. Look, Doc, the guy is right here in Pasteur Hospital. Maybe he's dead by now. He came in two days ago while you were away for the week-end. He's in Ward Nine."

Dr. Coffee picked up his phone. "His name?"

"I ain't sure. Only identification on him was a California driver's license issued to James Dorkness. I phoned California and the Motor Vehicle Bureau says Dorkness was killed by a hit-and-run driver a year ago."

"I see." Dr. Coffee dialed an inside number. "Dr. Green? . . . Dan Coffee in pathology. You have a man named Dorkness in Nine? . . . I see . . . Of course . . . How lucid? . . . And the prognosis? . . . Thanks, Doctor."

As Dr. Coffee gently replaced the instrument he said, "Max, your man was in a state of shock when admitted. The first day he had occasional semi-lucid periods of consciousness. Ever since, he's been in a deep coma which, together with significant jaundice, prompted a tentative clinical diagnosis of hepatitis, complicated by alcoholism; the man stank of alcohol when he came in. He's going to die. Have you arrested this woman—what's her name?"

"Eileen Osborn. She may be telling the truth, Doc, but of course you can never tell with these honey-child blondes. Am I getting too soft, Doc?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dr. Green says that in his rare moments of half consciousness the man kept repeating, 'I've been poisoned. The bitch poisoned me.' "

"No kidding? Look, Doc, Eileen's a looker. Maybe you ought to take a peek."

"Let me read today's surgicals first, Max." The pathologist gestured toward a rack of postage-stamp-size glass slides beside his microscope. "Then, if I'm free, I'd like to ride out with you and talk to Eileen Osborn. She sounds fascinating."

Eileen Osborn lived in a snug little middle-class development on the fringe of the more fashionable Northbank Heights, a colony of prize-winning *All-American Architecture* homes, each with five rooms, a minuscule lawn, and a quarter-acre backyard, distinguished from one another only by the color of the stucco, dimensions of the picture window, and position of the garage and fieldstone chimney.

Eileen herself was a well-molded little green-eyed blonde with long well-lacquered fingernails which, without her round, baby-faced innocence, might have been compared to the blood-reddened claws of a tiger. Driving out from the hospital, Ritter had told Dr. Coffee that Eileen was the childless widow of an advertising executive who had barely won medium affluence in his race against a perforated ulcer. His insurance policies were adequate if not spectacular.

The Widow Osborn was most cooperative in musical, magnolia-scented tones. She would be glad to repeat the whole story for Dr. Coffee.

"I was on my way to bed," she drawled. "It was sort of a warm sticky evenin', so I was takin' a shower, when my front doorbell rang. I turned off the water and stuck my head out the door and called, 'Come on in, Priscilla honey, the door's not locked.' "

"Who's Priscilla?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Why, that's Priscilla Pine, my next door neighbor. We're very close friends. Her husband's sales manager for a big chemical firm. He and my husband were pals. I'm very fond of him myself. But he's away a lot, visitin' branches and factories all over the country. Priscilla gets lonely and she's over here a lot when Lonesome—we call him 'Lonesome' Pine, but Priscilla is really the one that gets lonesome—is off on business."

"So you went right down to greet —as you thought—Priscilla?"

"Well, no. I was drippin'. I had to dry and powder myself and fix my face and hair. It was five, maybe ten minutes before I came down."

"And Priscilla wasn't there?"

"Well, no. Not then."

"She was here when I barged in," Ritter said.

"Of course. I phoned her to come

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over. I was hysterical. She sort of took charge. She got me a brandy and everything. It was awful. There was this strange man on the couch, unconscious. He didn't answer when I spoke to him. He'd been sick."

"Actively sick?"

"Yes."

Dr. Coffee turned to Lieutenant Ritter. "No sample, Max?"

The detective looked blank. "What of?" he asked.

"Oh, dear!" said Eileen. "I'm afraid I cleaned up before the Lieutenant got here. It was so awful. Did I do somethin' wrong?"

"Possibly," said Dr. Coffee. "Could we talk to Priscilla?"

They could indeed. Priscilla Pine came right over—a striking brunette with a beehive of well-teased hair, long turquoise spikes dangling from her ear lobes, her cheeks stylishly pallid and her full lips just touched with the fashionable shade of mortician pink.

She wanted to be helpful, but she could add nothing to Eileen's story. Yes, she had come right over when Eileen phoned. She had poured brandy for Eileen. She had tried to give some to the stranger, but he was out cold. Yes, she had helped Eileen clean up. Wouldn't any good neat housewife? No, she had never before seen the man called Dorkness.

"One of you said something to him when the stretcher bearers took him to the ambulance," Ritter said. "Which one?"

"I guess I'm just a little old sentimentalist." Eileen Osborn smiled wistfully. "But I suddenly felt sorry for this lonely man who had wandered into a strange house to collapse, maybe to die. Did he die, Doctor?"

Dr. Coffee turned to the detective before Ritter could reply. "Let's go, Max," he said.

On the way to the police car the pathologist asked, "What did she say, Max?"

"I thought she mumbled something like 'Goodbye, stranger.'" Ritter laughed sarcastically. "Stranger, my eye!"

The man who had been admitted to Pasteur Hospital under the name of James Dorkness died that night. Dr. Coffee did the autopsy himself. He was intrigued by the yellowish cast of the liver. Although this might indeed confirm the clinical diagnosis of hepatitis, or even cirrhosis, he wanted to double-check in view of the dead man's semi-delirious claim that he had been poisoned. While Doris Hudson, his lab technician, was putting tissue specimens through the thirty-six-hour routine to prepare them for the microscope, Dr. Coffee set up toxicological tests for heavy metals, a Reinsch test, and a Scherer test.

"On the surface, Max," said Dr. Coffee when Ritter sauntered into his laboratory next day, "it looks as if Dorkness was not poisoned by arsenic, antimony, bismuth, mer-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cury, silver, or phosphorus. Still, the man lived three days, so his body could have eliminated practically everything except arsenic, and I can definitely rule out arsenic. So let's wait until I get the sections under the microscope. You have any luck, Max?"

"Plenty," the detective said, "and all bad. You see Dorkness's picture in the morning papers? Well, I got one call from a guy who recognizes him—redhead named Noonan who runs Giuseppi's Dine and Dance joint, with a motel next door, out on River Road. Noonan says this Dorkness comes to his place two-three times a week this last month, usually with a dame. The night Dorkness passes out on Eileen's couch, he and this dame come in, eat a big spaghetti dinner, tank up on chianti and grappa, and then get into a loud hassle. The gal gets up and runs out on him. He waits a while, and when she doesn't come back, he pays the tab and scrams."

"And the woman was not Eileen Osborn?"

"Nope. I drive Eileen out to the roadhouse, but the redhead says no, he never saw her before. Dorkness's gal is no blonde, he says."

"Women wear wigs these days, Max."

"Yeah, I thought of that. Maybe I ought to get curious about the Widow Osborn's late husband's fatal ulcers. After all, she did rob us of a chance to analyze the contests of Dorkness's stomach.

The pathologist has an advantage over the toxicologist who is often stymied when chemical substances are altered or eliminated by the body. Many poisons make indelible changes in the microscopic architecture of the tissues. Thus, when Dr. Coffee examined the Dorkness slides and found the cells of the liver, kidneys, heart muscle, and brain characteristically packed with fat droplets, he immediately phoned Lieutenant Ritter.

"Max," he said, "better canvass the stores in Eileen Osborn's neighborhood to find out who's been buying rat poison lately. Your man Dorkness died of phosphorus poisoning."

"Are you kidding, Doc? How can you feed a guy rat poison without him getting wise?"

"Phosphorus has a garlicky smell and taste. The dead man's last meal was a spaghetti dinner. Just as the spaghetti was served, suppose the girl friend sent him out for something—maybe a handkerchief she dropped in the phone booth or a pack of cigarettes."

"Okay, Doc. You'll hear from me."

Ritter called back just as Dr. Coffee was about to shut up shop for the day. The Lieutenant was breathless. "Doc, get over to the Widow Osborn's right away. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quick! I found the druggist who sold the rat paste."

There were two squad cars at the curb outside Eileen Osborn's house and there was a uniformed policeman beside the open door. Eileen, her eyes red and swollen, her cheeks a polychromatic cosmetic mess, sat on the sofa making sniffling sounds.

"You're a minute too late, Doc," Max Ritter said. "The ambulance just left with Priscilla. The druggist identified her as the one who bought rat poison last week, so—"

"She came over and gave me this note and then collapsed right here on the floor." Eileen handed Dr. Coffee an envelope.

The pathologist read: "Eileen darling, you must forgive me. I can't stand having the police suspect you of killing Dorkness, and still, with my husband coming home tomorrow, how can I confess? I've been a stupid silly woman, Eileen, and the fact that I've been a lonely woman for a long time is no excuse.

"I was sitting in the bar at the airport one night, waiting for Joe to fly in from Chicago when a handsome stranger struck up an acquaintance with me. First the flight was delayed, then it was washed out. By that time we'd had quite a few drinks.

"Well, one thing led to another and before I realized what was happening I was seeing him every time Joe was away on business. It didn't take me long to discover I had made a tragic mistake. He was a blackmailer, and when I tried to break it off, he threatened to go to Joe.

"Luckily I hadn't given him my right name. But that night he followed me away from the roadhouse in another taxi, so—God forgive me, Eileen darling—I stopped in your driveway and went into your front door as I've done so many times before. That's why, when I decided the next night to get rid of him once and for all, he staggered into your house, thinking it was mine.

"My druggist just phoned to warn me the police were coming for me. And I simply can't face Joe—I just can't! There's still some rat paste left, so—

"All this must sound unbelievable to you—not at all like the Priscilla you've known. So I'll just say, 'Goodbye, stranger'."

"You sure this is Priscilla's handwriting?" Ritter asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes." Eileen dabbed at her eyes with a wisp of lace.

Ritter snorted. "I thought it was only dizzy blondes that got snarled up like this," he said.

"Nonsense, Max," said Dr. Coffee. "What about that brunette Salome a man called John lost his head over? And what about Cleopatra?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

***a thriller by* CORNELL WOOLRICH**

How two men—Moylan, the Big Guy, and Hammond, his henchman—bought a fountain pen with three gold bands and a small gold monkey's face at the top and bottom . . . a fountain pen that looked ordinary but carried death with it . . .

ADVENTURES OF A FOUNTAIN PEN

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THEY WERE IN A BASEMENT somewhere, just the three of them, and it was late at night. The place was full of shadows, and the shadows made six of them, one extra for each.

There was Moylan, better known as the Big Guy, and Hammond, one of his henchmen, and an individual known simply as the Screw, with that bull's-eye appropriateness that underworld nicknames often have.

They had a dummy rigged up for the sales demonstration, on the order of a football-tackle dummy, swinging from a hook under the basement rafters. It had a patch pocket stitched to the upper left-hand side of it, about where the breast pocket would be in an ordinary suit of clothes.

The Big Guy was bending over a table, studying two objects under the light. They were two fountain pens, both identical, with marbleized casings, three gold bands of diminishing widths, and a small gold monkey's face studding each end of both barrels, top and bottom.

"They're mates to the one Keller carries around with him," Hammond assured the Big Guy. "I found out where his came from, ordered two more like it, and then brought them over for him to go to work on them."

The Big Guy glanced sourly at the Screw. "It took you long enough," he growled.

"I wanted to do it right," the Screw protested in a high-pitched, quavering voice. "You sent word there was no hurry."

"Maybe so, but I don't want the party to die of old age in the meantime. That ain't the idea at all."

"He won't die of old age," the Screw promised. "Not after he's tried using one of these. Let me have one and I'll show you what they do."

Moylan quickly shifted his hands behind his back, one pen in each. "Wait a minute. I'm not taking any chances on them not being both

Copyright 1945 by Cornell Woolrich; originally titled "Dipped in Blood."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alike. You pick one sight unseen."

"They're both alike," the Screw said. He tapped Moylan's right arm, and Moylan gave him the one in that hand, retained the other.

The Screw carried it over to the dummy, inserted it carefully into the patch pocket, so that it stood upright, as it would in a vest or breast pocket.

Then he carefully moved the worktable back against the far wall, out of harm's way. "Stand back there against the wall yourselves," he advised.

"What about the place here?" Moylan asked, glancing upward at the ceiling. "Anyone likely to hear it?"

"There's no one else in the building but me—it's vacant. That's why I do my work down here. They rent out the basement to me."

He held up something invisible in his hands. "This is a loop of horsehair," he explained. "I'm going to slip it over the refill lever, like this. This is the dangerous part." He took several moments doing it. "All right, don't worry, it's on now," he assured them.

He then took out a long coil of string from his pocket. Unlike the horsehair, it was thick enough to be plainly seen from where they were.

"Then I tie the string onto the horsehair. That's because it's too thick to go around the refill lever itself, without starting it open. All right, I've got it hooked up now."

He started to move away from the dummy backward, carefully paying out the string as he went, until he was at about the same distance they were, at the far end of the oblong basement.

"It's very simple," he said. "Works on the same principle as an ordinary cigarette lighter. I have a tiny wheel of flint attached to the lever, on the inside of the pen, where the stuff is. When you pull up the lever to feed ink into the pen, it strikes a spark. *Boom.* No more hands, no more face. No more torso much either, at least, not all in one piece. The lever is the only detonator. You can push down as hard as you want on the point, and nothing happens. You can even drop it, as long as it don't land too hard, and still nothing happens. It's when you flip the lever out of its groove—"

His high-pitched, gleeful cackle and the way he chafed his hands together were unmistakable stigmata of latent insanity. But that was no deterrent as far as the Big Guy was concerned, as long as he was getting what he was paying for. "Never mind the lecture," he said gruffly. "Just does it work or doesn't it?"

"Watch and see." The Screw started to lift the string, so that the slack was taken up. "Take care of your eyes. The pen casing is liable to—"

Both men raised their bent arms as shields, pressed themselves flat against the wall. The Screw gave his arm a sudden, vicious jerk. There was a flash of unbearable brightness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that lighted up the whole basement. There was a blast of concussive air that slapped their faces and sealed their eardrums for a minute.

Then, and only then, a dull throbbing roar followed, that seemed to last a surprisingly long time, like rolling thunder. The place was obscured with smoke for a few moments, that only gradually thinned to a point at which they could see each other once more.

They stared at one another dazedly for a moment through the haze. The dummy had vanished completely. Particles of it adhered to the walls. The hook that had supported it was swaying empty. Some of the plaster had come down from the ceiling directly over where the dummy had hung.

The Screw was the first to speak. "Satisfied?" he asked triumphantly. "It has about the same force as a hand grenade, only twice as compressed."

Hammond was coughing strangledly, and wiping a bloody fleck from his cheek, where one of the fragments of the pen barrel had nicked him.

"Let's get out of here," Moylan choked. "Give him his five hundred dollars, and come on!"

"Sure the other one has just as much kick?" Hammond asked the Screw.

"I used the same proportion for both. You saw for yourself just now. And what's the natural position to take when you stick a pen into the neck of a bottle of ink, for instance, and pull up the lever so it'll drink up the ink? You hold your face down over it, close down over it, and watch it, to see if it's taking in the ink. Well, the blast goes up. Like I told you, no more—"

"Come on," Moylan urged impatiently. He had the door open already.

Hammond handed some money to the Screw. "It's all there. Keep your mouth closed about this, now." He closed the basement door and followed his chief up the stairs and outside into the night.

They strode across a vacant, rubble-filled lot to where a car stood waiting on the edge of a rutted, unpaved roadway. They got in. Hammond took out keys and made a motion to turn on the ignition.

Moylan stopped him with a chop of his hand. "Take your time. Let's sit here a minute first."

They sat in silent watchfulness for a moment or two, peering into the darkness around them.

"Guess nobody heard it."

"Nobody around to hear it. Nothing but vacant lots and junk heaps all around here."

They exchanged a look of perfect, unspoken understanding. Hammond unlatched the door and got out again.

"Use your own," Moylan suggested quietly.

Hammond disappeared in the direction from which they had both just come. Moylan waited where

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was, lightly tapping his fingers against the steering wheel.

Once a muffled thud sounded, from some distance away. As if somebody had carelessly dropped a hefty box or packing case, nothing more.

Suddenly, Hammond reappeared beside the car, completely self-possessed.

"Hear it?" he asked, getting in once more.

"Not much. Nothing to speak of."

"I closed the cellar door to keep it down all I could. Here's your five hundred back."

Moylan coolly put it away in his inside pocket.

"He didn't die right away," Hammond mentioned casually. "He fell down and he laughed. I asked him what he was laughing about. But he just laughed some more, and then finally he croaked."

Hammond pressed down the accelerator and they glided off—two men who had just bought a fountain pen.

The car was motionless again. The same car, the same two men. It was daylight now. Sunlight slanted across the sidewalk alongside which the car stood parked.

"There he goes," Hammond murmured.

Neither one moved. Their eyes were staring fixedly at the rear-sight mirror.

"I told you he'd go in there," Moylan answered. "He goes in to get shaved every morning regular."

"Wouldn't you think he'd take a bodyguard in with him?"

"He's forgotten about me. I don't think he even knows I've been let out yet. More important still, he doesn't know I'm wise to who turned State's evidence. They kept that undercover you know. I only got tipped off through the grapevine after I was already up."

They contemplated the little wedge of mirror with the patience of cats watching a mouse hole. A small barber pole was reflected on it, far back along the street, reduced to the scale of a stick of red-and-white peppermint candy.

"You'll have to go in there after him. I can't—he knows me. He's never seen you."

Hammond nodded. "I'll take care of it for you, boss." He reached for the door handle.

Moylan stopped him with a negligent pass of his hand. "Take your time. He goes for the works. Give him a chance to get under the hot towels first, so he can't watch you too close."

They waited in relaxed silence—two men killing time in a car.

Presently, Moylan asked, "Did you get a good look at him when he went in? You saw what he was wearing, now?"

"Dark-blue suit."

"All right, hit it, Hammond. He ought to be ready for the towels about now."

Hammond opened the door and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got out. They exchanged a brief look through the car window, then Hammond struck out down the street at a pace that was neither too hurried nor yet too desultory—at a pace that was simply that of an ordinary man on his way to a barber shop.

He turned in at the pole and entered a small, neat-looking shop that had four chairs. There were two barbers and two customers in it. One was upright, getting a haircut. His legs, in gray slacks, were crossed underneath the voluminous bib that swathed him.

The other customer was stretched out, his face a twisted mass of steaming toweling. A pair of dark-blue trousered legs were thrust full-length to the chair's tilted footrest.

The head barber glanced negligently over as he came in. He gave him the professional, "You're next," and went on working.

Hammond doffed his own coat, hung it alongside the dark-blue one on the wall—so close that they were partly superimposed, one atop the other. Then he sat down on the chair directly underneath the two.

A short interval went by. The man under the towels spoke in blurred tones through the small orifice left for him to breathe through. "Don't take too long, Angelo. I've got a heavy day ahead of me."

"In hell," concurred Hammond silently.

Both barbers had their backs to him. One customer was sightless under a second and final application of towels. The other was cut off from a view of him by the intervening form of the barber attending him. It was a quadruple play that was not likely to occur again for the rest of the day.

Hammond stood up inconspicuously and matter-of-factly, as if he had just decided he would like to smoke while waiting. He reached into his own inside coat pocket for a cigar. He extracted two objects with the one movement—a cigar and a fountain pen. They had been side by side in readiness.

He pinned the two coat lapels together with his free hand, so that while he seemed to be holding one back out of the way—his own—he was in reality holding the two. The adjoining dark-blue coat formed a sort of lining to his own. Its inside pocket was exposed in turn. The head of a fountain pen was revealed, held by its clip.

He withdrew that, replaced it with the one already in his hand, and let the under coat lapel fall back in place. Then he thrust the remaining pen into his own pocket, let that curl back to the wall, and sat down again.

It was all deftly and quickly done. The positions of the other four had remained unchanged in that brief minute or two. None of them had looked over at him. The switch had escaped notice.

He bit off the end of his cigar, held a match to it. He allowed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself a single long-drawn puff.

Then he stood up again, as though he had just remembered something —an errand he had to attend to or a call he had to make. The head barber looked over and saw him shrugging into his coat.

"Right with you," he promised.

"I'll be back in a minute," Hammond answered. "Keep my turn."

He walked out just a split second before the barber started unwinding the towels from the face of the man wearing the dark-blue trousers.

Outside, there was the faint sound of a car driving off from somewhere close at hand, unnoticed by the four within the shop. It must have been going in an opposite direction, for it never passed the place.

The junior barber was now holding a rear-view mirror up for the approval of the haircut customer. A moment later he had stepped down and begun leisurely to refasten his collar.

At almost the same time the other customer got through. The barber whisked the bib off him.

The two crossed one another's paths, going toward their clothes on the wall. The man in dark-blue trousers went toward the seedy, faded sweater hanging limply from one of the middle hooks. The man in the gray slacks went toward the dark-blue coat.

He put it on and went out.

The barber flicked a whisk broom to the shoulders of the other customer. "Your clothes don't match today, Mr. Keller," he remarked with friendly interest. "How come?"

"I was in a hurry, so I didn't bother. My wife must have put my coat where I couldn't find it. I only came out to get shaved and I'm going right back again, so it don't make any difference."

He shrugged on the topcaot he had used to cover up his ill-matched attire, and he went out, too.

The man in the gray slacks and blue coat was nervous. Three times he passed the bank entrance, coming and going, before he summoned up enough courage to go in. It was Friday and he was supposed to go in.

Every Friday he came here to the bank like this, and cashed a small check for his employer—a personal check to cover his employer's weekend expenses. He should have been used to it by now. But today was going to be different.

He went in finally and got on line. It was a pretty long line. That was good—better for him. The teller would be rushed, and he wouldn't notice. All they did was take it over to the file cards and compare it with the master signature.

Nothing to worry about there—the signature was genuine. The whole thing was genuine—all but the two extra zeros on the end of the amount. And it's awfully hard to tell about zeros—they all look alike.

They couldn't even phone the office and check on it. His boss

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't be there any more. His boss was over at the railroad station, waiting for him to bring the expense money to him right now. His boss went out of town every week-end, from Friday to Monday. That was the beauty of it, that was why it was so easy. And by Monday morning, he himself would be three days away. You can pack a lot of distance into three days.

The line crept forward. Whoever was on it behind him was in a big hurry. He kept shifting from foot to foot. He growled, "Come on, wake up, keep moving."

The man in the gray slacks didn't look around to see who he was. He didn't want to get into any arguments with anyone, not now of all times.

He was one down from the window now. He still had time to back out, drop off the line. Stay honest, stay safe. He knew he wouldn't, not now. He was too close to the point of carrying it out. He was being drawn forward, as by a magnet. There was no turning back. Nothing could save him.

The man behind him gave him an impatient dig. He sure was in a hurry, whoever he was. But again he refrained from looking around.

His turn now—he was up to the window.

The teller nodded to him. The teller knew him by sight, from other Fridays. He handed the check over. It was done now.

The teller looked at it, surprised. The two extra zeros. The word "hundred" that he'd put in on the second line, where there hadn't been anything at all before—not even that long dash that's supposed to be streaked across the face of a check to keep just such things from happening. When you're in a hurry to make a train, when you have a dozen other things on your mind at once, you grow careless; you don't take time to put in the hundredths symbol that stands for cents and should come right after the amount, nor the long dash that follows. When you keep on doing this Friday after Friday, that's how ideas are born in other people's minds.

The teller came back with it, after checking the signature. He couldn't make up his mind. The man in the gray slacks was perspiring where it couldn't be seen, down under his collar. The man behind him was shifting from foot to foot and swearing under his breath.

Suddenly, the teller shoved it back at him again, face down. "I suppose it's all right," he said, "but just initial it under your boss's indorsement. The amount's bigger than usual this time."

They had pens and ink over against the wall. But he would have lost his place in line if he went over there. He knew if he ever did that, he wouldn't have the courage to start all over again.

He reached into his pocket for his own fountain pen, tried to keep his hand from shaking. He brought

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out the pen, reversed the cap. Then he stopped and looked at it, astounded.

It was a strange pen he'd never seen before. How had it got into his pocket?

That was all the time he was given. The man behind him now suddenly moved in on him, jarred him out of the way with a heave of his shoulder and side, and took over his place at the window without waiting any longer for him to get through. Moreover, he blocked off the wicket by leaning close up to it, so that nothing could be seen any more except the very top of the teller's head.

The unexpected shove sent the man in gray slacks staggering two or three paces away, off balance. He left the loosely grasped pen behind, ownerless, on the glass slab. As a matter of fact, it was now pinned down securely underneath the aggressor's heavily planted forearm, without his noticing it. A fraction of it, the tip, no more, peered out from underneath his sleeve. He had both arms squared off possessively around the sill, in a sort of dog-in-the-manger attitude, that at the same time effectively concealed what he was doing.

The check, because it was lighter, paper weight, had stayed in its owner's grasp when he was sent lurching aside. He was still holding it between two fingers.

But something occurred to take his mind off pen and check alike. Something seemed to be going on all around him, right under his eyes, and yet he couldn't be sure just what it was. It was being done very quietly, very unnoticeably, and he was hypnotized by it into a sort of frozen disbelief.

He could see a part of the teller's face over the shoulder of the man standing there before him. The part that he could see looked strangely white, he thought. The teller's eyes had a glassy look.

The people on line behind the man in question, accustomed to long waits in these flourishing times, were docilely uncomplaining, staring idly this way and that, with blank faces. Besides, the frosted glass paneling, along which they were strung out, obstructed their view to the inside. They couldn't see the teller at all from where they were standing.

The man in the gray slacks had a slantwise view—he was up front and out a little from the orifice. They were in closer and standing one behind the other.

There was a bank guard across the floor, but instead of coming over to inquire what the hitch was, he was standing up against the wall, stiff and still. Somebody had stopped before him, as if to ask him a question. But the question seemed to continue indefinitely. Neither one of them moved. They just stood there like that, eye to eye.

The man in the gray slacks took an incautious step forward, to try

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to close in again on the wicket from which he'd just been ousted so brusquely. Instantly, there was a man standing at his elbow who hadn't been there until now. He hadn't been on line, either. Where he'd come from, the man in the gray slacks had no idea.

The newcomer was holding one hand negligently to his inner pocket, as if in the act of reaching for a cigarette. But the cigarette never came out. His hand just stayed that way.

"Wait your turn, buddy," he said tonelessly. His lips hardly moved.

"But it was my—"

"Don't answer back, buddy. This is no time to be answering back. I mean it for your own good." The hand bedded under his lapel stayed very still. Everything about him stayed very still.

The man in the gray slacks didn't answer back. Something told him not to. He could feel thought waves of death all around him in the air, and wondered where they were coming from. No one seemed to be doing anything. It was a good time to stand very still, and not move your hands or your feet or your jaw, just stay in one place, not even breathe any more than was absolutely necessary.

Neither the teller's hands nor the customer's were visible—they were down too low. But their shoulders were moving busily, indicating surreptitious motion. The teller's were flinching, as though he were shoving something forward through the opening down at hand level. The customer's were contracting and expanding, as though he were sweeping something toward him, and coming back every minute for more. Then there was a muffled slapping sound, as when something keeps falling into a canvas bag or sack held open to catch it.

The tip of the fountain pen suddenly disappeared from under the arm that had been clamped down on it, like something swept up and carried along in a flowing tide going by where it had been resting.

There was a strange stillness all over the bank. A sort of lull. Though there hadn't been any noise before, there was even less now.

The customer who had hogged the wicket turned away, started toward the entrance, a small canvas bag with a double grip swinging low at his side.

Then, suddenly, all hell seemed to break loose.

An alarm bell started to jangle raucously, all over the place at once. A shot crashed out, another, a third. Then a hail of them.

The waiting line crumbled away like sand. People broke and ran, then changed directions and ran back the other way again, bumping into those who were still running the first way.

The man in gray slacks dropped down to a shoelace-tying level, knee to ground and head low, and stayed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that way, but without tying his shoelaces.

Then it ended—just as suddenly as it had begun. Those on the floor picked themselves up and looked around dazedly. There was a thin haze of smoke all over the place. There were cops and more of them were coming in every minute.

The man who had been crowding the bank guard for so long now stood with his back to the wall in turn, very straight and very still, with a gun pointing out of a cop's hand to keep him that way.

The man who had been reaching for his cigarettes for so long had finally brought his hand out. But no cigarettes were to be seen. And something red was running down all over his hand from under his sleeve.

The canvas sack stood quietly on the floor, not more than five yards from the entrance. The man who had been carrying it lay flat on his back beside it, in a neat ruler-straight line. One hand was still twisted through the double grip. Otherwise, he'd changed his mind completely about taking it outside with him.

The man in gray slacks was white and shaky when he finally came out of the bank about a quarter of an hour later. The fountain pen was still lying beside the canvas sack squatting inside there on the floor. He hadn't even asked for it back. Let it stay there; he didn't want it. It wasn't his anyway.

He hadn't cashed the check either. He'd brought it out with him; it was still in his hand.

He tore it into small pieces as soon as he was safely outside. Then he tore the small pieces into smaller ones. He'd tell his boss he'd lost it in the excitement. His boss wouldn't mind so much. It had only been for twenty-five dollars—without the two extra zeros.

He went away from there in a hurry, without looking back. What was that old saying? "Crime doesn't pay." It sure didn't. He was going to be honest the rest of his life.

The guard came in and put the fountain pen on the bank manager's desk.

"They found this next to the getaway bag, he said. "The inspector told me to bring it in to you.'

"It must belong to the teller."

"No, sir, they've already asked him."

"One of the customers dropped it in the excitement, then. Leave it here. I'll hold it until someone claims it."

The guard closed the door and went out. The manager hadn't fully got over his fright yet. He gulped down an aspirin, mopped his forehead, then sat down and scanned some papers with a jittering hand. He took up one of his desk pens, dipped it to sign the papers.

It came up dry. His desk well hadn't been filled.

He saw the fountain pen lying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there, reached for it. But there was no ink in that either.

His nerves were taut. He put it down with considerable asperity and pressed a buzzer.

He was still uncomfortably warm under his collar. He swung around and snapped on a switch. An electric fan, facing his desk from over in the corner, whirred on.

All the papers on the desk reared up a little along one edge, shifted over an inch or two. One of them nudged the pen barrel. The pen rolled lazily over, just once. Then the clasp on the outside of it stopped it, acting as a brake.

A girl opened the door.

"After this, will you please see that there's ink on my desk before I come in every day?"

The draft of the open door, added to the current coming from the fan, sent a spurt of tail wind playing over the desk.

The pen stirred, took another swing over, playing leapfrog over its own clasp. Again the clasp would have braked it—only this time there was no more desk top left for the clasp to snag on.

The pen went over. It landed in a yawning wastebasket, paper-choked and directly under with a very light impact that was drowned out by the hum of the fan.

She came in after everyone else had gone. She always did. She was a very tired-looking woman, painfully thin.

It was quiet and her footsteps echoed weirdly in the silence, but she wasn't frightened. She was used to empty places. That was her job—empty places. Sometimes she was the only living thing in a whole building.

She took out her passkey, opened the door, and put on the lights. Then she brought in her pail and brush, got down on her knees, and went to work scrubbing the floor.

She went around the man's desk, and under it. Her thoughts kept time with the endless swiveling of her tired arm. Tommy was graduating today. He was all she had. That was why she was doing this, for him. She ought to have a present for him. It didn't seem right.

She picked up the wastebasket, to take it outside and empty it. Then she saw what was lying in it, right on top of all the papers. She reached for it and lifted it out. It looked almost brand-new.

A fountain pen. That was what you gave them; that made the best kind of graduation present.

She examined it, and she was no fool. She could tell right away its being in there like that was an accident. It must have fallen in by mistake. People didn't throw anything like that away, with three gold bands on it. Even if it didn't work quite right, they would have it repaired.

She oughtn't to do it. It belonged to someone. She ought to put it back on the desk, or turn it in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

downstairs when she clocked out. She'd never done anything like this before.

But Tommy was graduating today. She didn't have any present for him. The man who owned this office must be rich. What was a fountain pen to him? Besides, it was in the wastebasket, wasn't it? She was entitled to whatever was in the wastebasket.

She fumbled underneath her apron, and the fountain pen disappeared.

Then she went ahead grimly, scrubbing. All right, so she'd taken something that didn't belong to her. But Tommy was going to have a present today for his graduation. She hummed a little under her breath while she worked.

Hammond brought Moylan's kid to the office with him right after the graduation was over.

"Well, here's the young perfessor back," he announced. "Graduated and all."

Moylan was proud of him. "I bet he knows more than we both do now," he said to Hammond. "I quit when I got up to 4A."

"Why weren't you there, Pop?" the kid wanted to know in a shrill voice. "All the other kids' fathers were there."

Moylan got sort of red in the face and tight around the collar. He couldn't seem to find the right answer right away.

"Is it because you were up at that place, Pop?"

"Shut up," Moylan said gruffly. He became very busy suddenly, rifling through papers on his desk. "Now clear out of here. I got work to do. Take him home with you, Hammond."

"Hey, sign your name in my autograph book first, will you, Pop?" The kid opened a small autograph album someone had given him. "I got everyone's name in here but yours—all the kids' in my class and all the teachers'. Wait'll I get some ink in this first."

He leaned across the edge of Moylan's desk from the outside, trying to reach the set-in inkwell with a fountain pen that had materialized from one of his pockets.

Moylan was sitting very still suddenly, unnaturally still. His color started to drain off as though he were hooked up to a transfusion tube. His eyes started to get bigger and to come out forward in his head. His lips parted over silence; the voice that was supposed to come through log-jammed somewhere down below. When it finally did make it all the way up and out, it was scratchy and full of sand.

"Where'd you get that pen? That's the one! Three gold bands and a monkey's face on the top and bottom. Put it down!"

The kid had it harpooned into the ink by now, but he'd had to raise his feet clear off the floor in order

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to reach it. The desk was the size of a pool table.

"I pinched it off a guy in school," he said. "His old lady gave it to him for a graduation present. He never even felt me take it. What're you so scared of, Pop?"

"Hammond!" his father screamed. "Take it away from him."

Moylan couldn't reach him across the desk from where he sat; and he couldn't escape from the swivel chair on either side—the kid had him hemmed in. There was only one way to get farther away from it than he was already, and that was backward.

Hammond took one look. Then he cringed, shrank back. He was brave enough when it came to shooting down an unarmed crackpot in a basement, for instance. But he didn't have nerve enough to take a chance on getting over to the kid before that refill lever went up.

Instead Hammond threw up his arm to shield his face, and backed away, cowering. He retreated to the threshold, on across it, and out into the hallway beyond the office. He kept backing until the far wall out there stopped him.

The kid had a perverse streak in him. Maybe it was a trait that had come from Moylan himself. He saw that something about the pen scared the wits out of his father. He'd never seen his father scared before.

He lifted the pen from the ink and lunged at his father with it, point foremost.

Moylan reared up against the back of the chair, his arms a flurried frenzy, his voice a howl now. The chair was swivel-topped. When weight went to the back, the chair went to the back. It gave a sudden crazy lurch, as though its stem had broken.

There was a window behind him. It was closed, but it was glass.

There was a shattering explosion —not from the pen, but an explosion of window glass. Particles snapped all over the place, like hailstones.

There was no more window. There was just a frame, rough-edged with a lot of jagged glass splinters studding the inner sides of it. The chair teetered empty, tilted all the way back.

A scream went winging down somewhere outside, burning itself out with the velocity of its own descent long before it had hit anything to stop it.

The office was on the twenty-second floor.

Keller and his junta were sitting around their usual table at Dinty's Restaurant, late that same night, when the news first came in. It was their regular nightly gathering place. They were always to be found there, from midnight until two or three in the morning.

There was a new member present tonight, someone who was being broken into the group. He was very anxious to please his new boss and show himself worthy of the privi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lege of being admitted to the inner circle.

Frankie, the blind newsman who peddled at Dinty's, came in with a batch of the early-morning edition under his arm. Frankie was Keller's pet charity. He always bought as many papers as there were members of his crowd seated around the table. He always gave Frankie a five-dollar bill in payment, and then refused change.

There were six of them at the table tonight besides himself. "Six, Frankie," he said, and gave him the usual bill.

"Thanks, Mr. Keller! Gee, thanks!" the newsman babbled, and after going around the table and dealing out six papers, he trudged on his way.

Everyone began to read—everyone, that is, except Keller himself. He sat back comfortably puffing on a cigar, eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Hey, boss, here's something you're going to like," somebody exclaimed.

"Yeah? What?" asked Keller benevolently.

"Remember Moylan? It says here he isn't with us any more."

Keller brought his eyes down to table level, chuckled contemptuously. "No kidding? Read it to me. That's the kind of an obituary I enjoy listening to."

"It says he took a fast freight out of an office window twenty-two stories up."

The new member thought he saw a chance of ingratiating himself with his chief. He'd been watching for something like this all evening. Quick as a flash he stood up in his seat and offered his own paper across the table to Keller. "Here y'are, boss, take mine," he said eagerly.

Keller didn't seem to hear him at first. In fact, he didn't even seem to see the paper, although it was pointed straight out toward his chest.

There was an uncomfortable silence for a minute. No one seemed to know what to say. Somebody coughed uneasily.

The neophyte, however, was not sensitive to nuances. He repeated his offer. "Go ahead, boss, help yourself," he urged. "Read mine. I don't need it."

This time he got results. A thunderous scowl darkened Keller's recently jovial face. "Shut up," he growled, "you young squirt!"

Somebody kicked the offender's shin under the table, and he sat down as abruptly as he'd risen.

The strained pause in the conversation continued. Keller got up finally, his face still flushed with displeasure. "Be right back, fellows," he said tersely. "Think I'll go over and get a fresh light for my cigar."

The moment he was gone, the question that had been sticking in the novice's throat burst out unchecked. "What'd I do?"

"You dope," was the scathing answer. "Don't never go offering him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a newspaper or a magazine in front of everybody, like you just did. Didn't anybody wise you up? He can't read or write! Not even his own name. And he hates for anyone to catch on."

The culprit's mouth dropped open and stayed that way.

"But . . . but he carries a fountain pen around in his pocket. I saw it with my own eyes only a minute ago, when he was sitting here."

"Oh, sure," was the reply. "He's been carrying that around for years. But he's never once used it yet, and he never will. It's just a bluff. Like I told you, he don't like anyone to catch on. He's sensitive about it, see? People that don't know him very well—it fools them."

"He didn't die right away," Hammond had said to Moylan. "He fell down and he laughed. I asked him what he was laughing about. But he just laughed some more."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Archer, Frank	THE BALABANG PEARL	Doubleday	$3.50	Sept. 18
Black, Gavin	THE EYES AROUND ME	Harper & Row	3.95	Sept. 9
M.W.A. Anthology (John Creasy, ed.)	CRIMES ACROSS THE SEA (Mystery Writers of America)	Harper & Row	3.95	Sept. 9
Disney, Doris Miles	THE DEPARTURE OF MR. GAUDETTE	Doubleday	3.50	Sept. 18
Freeling, Nicolas	QUESTION OF LOYALTY	Harper & Row	3.95	Sept. 23
Gardner, Erle Stanley	THE CASE OF THE HORRIFIED HEIRS	Morrow	3.50	Sept. 30
Gruber, Frank	THE GREEK AFFAIR	Dutton	3.95	Sept. 16
Jay, Simon	DEATH OF A SKIN DIVER	Doubleday	3.95	Sept. 4
McBain, Ed	AX	Simon & Schuster	3.50	Sept. 11
Hubbard, P. M.	PICTURE OF MILLIE	London House & Maxwell	3.75	Sept. 14
Porter, Joyce	DOVER ONE	Chas. Scribner's	3.50	Sept. 3
Shannon, Dell	MARK OF MURDER	Morrow	3.50	Sept. 2
Troy, Simon	DON'T PLAY WITH THE ROUGH BOYS	Macmillan	3.95	Sept. 14
Wallis, Dave	ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE	Dutton	3.95	Sept. 24
Wuorio, E-L.	THE WOMAN WITH THE PORTUGUESE BASKET	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	3.50	Sept. 10

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Audemars, Pierre	THE CROWN OF NIGHT	Dolphin Books	95¢	Sept. 4
Ford, Leslie	ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT	Popular Library	50¢	Sept. 15
The Gordons	MURDER ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIN	Popular Library	50¢	Sept. 1
Hamilton, Donald	THE RAVAGERS (Original)	Gold Medal	40¢	Aug. 27

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 269th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a solid performance, and a most promising debut in print.

The author was born in 1936 in a quiet town in East Tennessee. He grew up "doing a good bit of fishing on the Hiawassee River [the locale of his 'first story'] and picking wild muscadines on its banks." He "bungled" his way through Auburn University, where he was (still quoting the author) "the shadiest black sheep in the school of architecture."

Mr. Purser has dozens of hobbies, but tennis—he played on the college varsity team for three years—is still his favorite. Occupations (so far): printer's devil on a weekly county newspaper, supervisor of a kiddies' wading pool, painter of bedspread-making machines (try that on "What's My Line?"!), "wading in the Tennessee River in a wig and long stockings for Walt Disney" (with Davy Crockett?), and most recently, Air Force lieutenant working on the Titan I missile program.

Let's see more, Mr. Purser . . .

DEATHS ON THE HIAWASSEE

by TOM VARNER PURSER

DEPUTY SHERIFF ELMO TOLLIver took the phone call late on a steamy Sunday afternoon. The woman said she would have called sooner but she just hadn't been able to bring herself to admit that her husband was probably dead. Yesterday morning he had thrown his rod and reel in his boat and started for the river. She hadn't seen him since.

"I don't think I'll *ever* see him again," the woman sobbed just before she hung up. "I think he's at the bottom of the river."

Across the dark room on the bottom floor of the jail the Sheriff, all 210 pounds of him, sat slumped in the ancient swivel chair, his bare feet thrust through the open window into the sunlight. He stripped the matchstick between his lips and then meticulously examined its mangled tip. "Got troubles?" he grunted.

"Ed McCabe's wife," Elmo said. "Ed didn't come home last night."

The Sheriff grimaced. "I've seen the woman—I wouldn't blame Ed too much for that. Has he been gone long?"

"Since yesterday morning. She says he left for the mouth of the creek to do a little fishing."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"By himself?"

Elmo nodded.

"He's drunk, most likely," said the Sheriff. "Stretched out drunk in some slough with a couple of fruit jars of rotgut."

"I know Ed," Elmo said. "He's not a drinking man. When he goes fishing he fishes."

The Sheriff returned what was left of the matchstick to his mouth and looked at Elmo. The trouble with his deputy was that he just didn't *look* like a deputy. He was too small, too scrawny—he made the Sheriff think of a whooping crane, with anemia maybe.

"How tall are you, Elmo?" the Sheriff asked, shifting his own bulk slightly in the swivel chair.

Elmo pulled himself up straight in his chair. "Five foot five—and a half," he said. "What's that got to do with Ed McCabe?"

"Oh, nothing," the Sheriff said. Sometimes it was hard for him to take the little man seriously; but he'd learned too much from past experience not to. "Maybe you'd better go take a look," he told him. "If you can't turn up something we'll have to organize a full-scale search in the morning. You may want to get Papa Jim to go with you."

Elmo was reaching for his hat. "I was planning on it," he said.

Papa Jim Jenkins knew the Hiawassee River. He knew the lakes, the creeks, the sloughs that ran into it and off it ten times better than any other man in east Tennessee. For more than 70 years Papa Jim had lived on the water, hiring out as guide to the sportsmen who came to the valley to fish the TVA lakes, making just enough to get by on. Whenever a man was missing on water anywhere in the county—and over the years there were numerous drownings—Papa Jim was the natural choice to head the search.

His cabin was perched at the foot of a piny knob on the edge of Richland Creek—only a one-room shack with a rough-brick fireplace at one end and an open porch that ran the width of the front, where you could sit and look a mile and a half down the creek to the last bend before the river.

Years ago Papa Jim had dug back into the clay bank behind the cabin to make room for an outhouse, a woodshed, and a muscadine arbor. Over the seasons since the death of his son the grapes had claimed almost all the old man's time and attention, and somehow from that miserable, unfertile soil on the side of the little hill there came muscadines rich and dark and sweet, muscadines that were the old man's pride—he told people they were his whole life . . .

About four miles outside town Elmo parked the car on the edge of the road near the top of the hill and started down the footpath. The trail wound back and forth down the hill until there was a sudden break in the heavy underbrush and Elmo found

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself standing in a clearing beside a woodshed.

He also found himself looking down the barrel of a shotgun.

The old man's small blue eyes blinked once, then softened with recognition of Elmo. He lowered the shotgun. "You ought not come creeping up on a man like that," he said. "Liable to get yourself shot one of these days."

Elmo thought he saw the hint of a smile behind the thick white beard. "Didn't see any place to knock, Papa Jim. You expecting somebody?"

"Expecting the Big Deals," the old man snorted.

Elmo wasn't sure he'd heard right.

The old man saw the puzzled look on the deputy's face. "Some smart-aleck kids," he explained. "They wear masks and call themselves that."

"You've got a pretty mean reception ready there," Elmo said, glancing at the gun.

"They steal my muscadines. They swing on the vines and tear them down."

"It's still pretty rough—for kids."

"It's only popcorn—I fill my shells with popcorn kernels. It doesn't hurt bad. I hit one of them night before last and it didn't hurt him much. I'll have to keep shooting them as long as they try to tear down my muscadines." Papa Jim raised the gun and motioned toward the woodshed. "Some more of their work—it's their mark."

Two large letters—*BD*, with a rough circle around them—were sloshed across the door of the shed in red paint.

"How many of them were there?" Elmo asked.

"Five or six. They've been here twice—I think there were more the second time."

"Any idea whose kids they are?"

"They wore masks," Papa Jim said. "But they couldn't have been over ten or twelve years old—just smart-aleck kids."

Elmo nodded. "I know the kind. They sit around on a summer night and can't find anything to do. So one of the brighter ones figures it would break the monotony if they went out and turned over a tombstone or two. I'll talk to the Sheriff and see what we can do about it."

"I hope you can stop them," Papa Jim said. "If you can't—"

"We'll stop them," Elmo said. "But there was something else I came to see you about."

The old man turned away and stared out across the creek. "I know why you came," he said stiffly. "Let me show you something."

Elmo followed him around the side of the cabin and down to the water's edge. A small red flat-bottomed boat was pulled up on the sand. It had an outboard motor turned up at its stern.

"Ed McCabe's boat," said Papa Jim.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where'd you find it?"

"About two miles downriver—caught up along the north bank in some weeping willow branches."

"Any sign of Ed?"

The old man looked at Elmo. "The main channel runs on the north side there. It's forty feet deep in parts."

The nearest phone was a mile down the road from Papa Jim's place. The Sheriff sounded worried when he answered, but he listened quietly while Elmo gave him the news. "You won't have to tell Ed's wife," Elmo said. "I'll stop by and see her on the way in."

"No sense coming in now," the Sheriff said. "There's still two good hours of daylight left."

"No sense staying out here either," Elmo said. "I can't do anything else here."

In a kindly way the Sheriff told Elmo there was plenty he could do. "Ed's wife called again a few minutes ago," he said. "Seems she forgot to tell us that Ed's cousin—they call him C.C., I think—went out early this morning to look for Ed."

"Don't tell me any more," Elmo said.

"He hasn't come back from the river either," the Sheriff said, telling him anyway. "He went out in a boat same as Ed's, except for the color. C.C.'s is a baby blue."

Elmo sighed. "We'll see what we can find."

"Just don't stay out too long," the Sheriff said. "I want you off that river when it starts coming dark. I don't want to have to come looking for you."

"Don't worry about me," Elmo said. "I've got an experienced guide."

There were dozens of sloughs that ran back into the hills along both sides of the river. They had worked down eight or nine of them, going down the river from the mouth of the creek in the cool of the late afternoon. Elmo was just about to tell Papa Jim to turn back when the old man pointed far downstream to a single dot on the surface of the water.

When they came up alongside it they saw that the small blue boat was floating upside down. Elmo looked for a break in the rough shoreline. "We'll tow it over there and right it," he said.

It was a light boat and not hard to pull onto the ground and turn right side up. When they let it fall flat they both saw the red paint at the same time.

Papa Jim stared unbelievingly at Elmo. "They couldn't do this," he muttered. "No kids could do this!"

It was hard for Elmo to believe they could have. But he couldn't deny the two letters painted inside the roughly drawn circle on the back seat of the boat.

There was nothing else. No motor, no oars, no sign that anyone had ever been in the boat. Papa Jim and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elmo pulled it into the underbrush so that it could not be seen from the river, and by the time they pushed off from the sandbank it was late twilight; the water was still and dark green and their boat skimmed lightly across it ahead of the quiet hum of the motor.

At first they didn't talk. They sat still in the boat and watched the shore and the hills become dark around them. They watched the sky, reflected on the smooth surface of the water, broken now and then by a small circle where a bass had splashed. The spray wet their faces and when the channel ran near the shore the smell of honeysuckles was rich and thick in the cool night air.

They came to the mouth of the creek and headed into it. Papa Jim cut down the motor almost to an idle and took a last look down the river. Then he looked back to Elmo.

"It was a night like this when I lost my boy," he said.

"Did you have a son?" Elmo asked, not because he didn't know, but because he knew nothing else to say. The whole county knew about Papa Jim's son. They knew the stories about the boy's mother running away with a TVA man, about the boy's disappearance on the river. But no one had ever heard any part of it from Papa Jim himself.

"A night cool and still like this," he said, ignoring Elmo's question. "Thirty-three years ago—to the month. It was late in August and the wild muscadines were full and ripe all over these hills."

"How did it happen?" Elmo said.

"He was just turned eighteen. He would have children now, a grandson maybe." The old man's eyes looked small and tired. "We never found him. There were no dams then and the river ran hard and deep."

"Did you know for sure he went to the river?" Elmo asked.

"I knew. I knew because he asked me to go with him. We had a trotline up the river, across the mouth of a big slough, fishing with cutbait. The boy and I would run it first thing every morning, then in the evening just before dark—"

"You didn't go with him that time?"

"I always went with him. It's not easy for a man to run a trotline by himself. But I didn't go with him that evening."

"Why didn't you?"

"I told him I couldn't go, not to go by himself."

"Why? Why couldn't you go, Papa Jim?"

"It was the muscadines . . . I was building the arbor for them—I wanted to finish it that evening while the air was cool. I finished it too, after the sun was down and the air was cool . . . while my boy was drowning."

Elmo said nothing and the old man sat still for some time.

"My son is dead," he said abruptly, "but I have very good muscadines." He turned back to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

motor, jerked the throttle open, and water churned up behind the boat.

It was a fire for certain, but it looked too far back from the water to be Papa Jim's cabin. They saw it the minute they rounded the bend—a tiny strip of orange far down the creek against the long black ridge.

"It's the arbor," the old man cried. "They're burning down my muscadines!"

The little motor was already running full throttle and it was a good ten minutes before the boat rammed the shore in front of the cabin; but by the time they got to the arbor there was almost nothing left. A maze of charred vines covered the ground, pierced here and there by strips of wood still burning.

There was no sign of anyone, but there was no question who had been there. This time the red paint almost covered the front wall of the woodshed, and Elmo was able to read the message in the flicker of light that came from the last flames of the gutted arbor.

It would have been better if you had let us alone and shared your muscadines with us—we don't like to get shot at—The Big Deals

Elmo heard a small whimper behind him. Papa Jim was sitting on the wood chopping block staring at the ax he held in his hands.

"We'll find them," Elmo said. "They'll pay for it."

The old man turned his head away and looked back at the ashes. "I don't want pay. I want the grapes . . . my arbor."

"It's ruined, Papa Jim—but they'll pay. And you can plant new vines."

"No, I'm too old for new vines."

"They'll grow fast," Elmo said. "There'll be grapes on them before you know it."

"I want no new vines, no new arbor," the old man said, speaking quietly and patiently to Elmo, as if he were trying to explain something extremely complicated to a small child. "Those vines were my life—for more than thirty years I cared for them with the love of a father for his only son and now they are dead and you try to tell me there is time for new vines. I don't want new vines. I don't want anything now."

Elmo put his hand on the old man's shoulder. "It won't seem so bad after a while," he said. "You go into the cabin and wait now. I want to go call the Sheriff and get him out here to take a look."

Papa Jim stood up, still holding the ax at his side. "I'll go with you," he said. "I don't want to stay here any more."

"It's your home," Elmo said. "You have to stay here, Papa Jim."

"No," the old man insisted. "You have to take me with you. You have to—"

For an instant Elmo thought the blow was intended for him. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

old man had turned suddenly to the side and lifted the ax behind his shoulder. Then the blade flashed in the light from the dying fire and fell heavily against the padlock on the woodshed door. The old man dropped the ax on the ground beside the padlock and the broken hasp.

"I'll go to the cabin and get my things now," he said. "Open that door—the reason I have to go with you is in there."

He turned and went to the house. Elmo opened the woodshed door but it was too dark inside to see anything, so he went down to the boat for his flashlight. When he came back and threw the beam of light against the back wall of the shed he saw them clearly enough.

Ed McCabe and his cousin C.C. were sitting side by side on the clay floor, leaning against the rear wall. From the way they sat with their arms folded in their laps and their heads nodding on their chests, Elmo thought for a moment they were asleep, or drunk. But then he saw the blood matted in their hair and he realized they were dead.

At first the Sheriff was sure Elmo and Papa Jim were trying to play some hideous practical joke on him; the old man would not talk and it took a while for Elmo to convince the Sheriff his story was true.

The old man continued to refuse to talk and Elmo asked the Sheriff to let them alone for a while. They stayed in the room for half an hour and then Elmo brought him out and the Sheriff took Papa Jim down the hall and locked him in a cell by himself.

The old man sat down on the bunk and stared at the wall and began to cry. When Elmo and the Sheriff left to go back to the cabin, Papa Jim was still sitting there with his head in his hands, crying softly to himself.

After the ambulance had come and gone, Elmo and the Sheriff stood alone beside the ashes of the muscadine arbor. There was a breeze coming off the creek and across the ridges to the south Elmo could see little flashes of summer lightning.

The deputy nudged a piece of charred wood with the toe of his boot. "Rain," he said, speaking only to himself. "It's coming up the river."

The Sheriff didn't bother to look. "Why'd he do it?" he said. "Was he—is he just plain crazy?"

"In his own peculiar way," Elmo said. "He knew what he was doing when he painted the two letters and the circle on the back seat of C.C.'s boat."

"To make us think it was that gang of kids?"

"He wanted us to think that, all right. But not just to cover himself. Those little vandals were stealing his muscadines, tearing down his arbor. Getting us after them in a big way was the best way he knew of getting them out of his hair."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But what about Ed—why him? The old man didn't try to put the blame for him on the kids."

"Blaming the kids was just something Papa Jim thought of *after* he killed C.C. It wasn't the real reason." Elmo knelt down, picked up a handful of dirt, and held it out under the Sheriff's flashlight. "Did you ever notice the soil on this hill?"

"It's clay," the Sheriff said, "worthless red clay."

Elmo sifted the dirt out over the ashes. "Let me use the light a minute," he said. He took the flashlight, walked over to the woodshed, went in, then reappeared with a garden hoe.

"Now hold the light for me," he told the Sheriff. "I want to rake back some of these vines."

The Sheriff grunted. "You looking for something?"

Elmo didn't have to answer him. A moment later the trenches were there in front of the flashlight. They were partially filled with vines and ashes and pieces of charred wood, but they looked to be two or three feet deep, maybe six feet long.

The Sheriff grunted again, much louder.

Elmo looked at him. "People around here sometimes bury fish in their flower gardens for fertilizer. Papa Jim was too poor to buy commercial fertilizer for his arbor—and after his boy died he gave up fishing for himself."

The Sheriff just stood there staring at the trenches. "You mean he buried them for—"

Elmo nodded. "Since he was a guide and knew everybody who fished these waters—and was often alone on the river with them—it wasn't too hard for him. He told me he usually did it with an oar across the back of the neck. He'd bring the bodies back here and store them in the woodshed until he had time to bury them in the arbor. Then he'd take their boat down the river after dark and turn it over—another drowned fisherman, washed down the river and never found."

"Usually?" the Sheriff said. "You said he *usually* did it with an oar. How many times were there?"

"He couldn't remember exactly. He said he guessed he buried one or two people a year on the average. For thirty years. You figure it out."

There was a hard gust of wind off the creek and the Sheriff shuddered. "Let's go," he said. "There's nothing else we can do here tonight."

By the time they reached the car near the top of the hill it had begun to rain. Elmo looked back and tried to see down through the trees to the cabin, but there was nothing there but the dark.

The Sheriff started the car and they drove toward town; after a few minutes the road came out in a clearing at the crest of the hill. Elmo was staring over the treetops

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the rain on the river when the Sheriff grunted again.

"I just thought of something," he said.

Elmo nodded inquiringly.

"In the woodshed—there wasn't anybody in there besides Ed and C.C., was there?"

Elmo shook his head.

The Sheriff looked confused. "I'd swear I saw *three* graves dug out under those vines."

"You saw right," Elmo said. "Papa Jim told me he knew someone would be coming to look for Ed and C.C. He planned to be ready."

"You're not serious," the Sheriff said, then looked at Elmo and saw that he was. "All right then," he said. "If that's so, what about you?"

"You mean why didn't I end up sitting alongside those two in the woodshed?"

"That's right—the old guy must have had plenty of chances to lay an oar on the back of your head too."

Elmo shrugged. "It wasn't that. At the jail he told me he hadn't expected *me* to come. With two disappearances at one time he didn't think you'd send just a deputy. When he saw me . . ."

"What—when he saw you what?"

"He said it wasn't worth it—that I was too . . . scrawny. Said I didn't have enough meat on me to make it worth the trouble he went to digging the hole. He just didn't expect you to send me, Sheriff."

The Sheriff answered with a final grunt. He shifted his 210 pounds heavily in the seat and stared ahead at the rain on the road.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The first full-length "Saint" novel in twenty years

starts in a Naples restaurant, when an ugly brawl interrupts Simon Templar's *lobster alla Vesuvio* . . . continues with the mysterious appearance of a luscious pasta named Gina . . . and ends with the debonair Robin Hood of Modern Crime tackling the entire Sicilian Mafia — in chivalrous combat as timely as today's headlines. $3.95 at all booksellers

Vendetta for the Saint

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A CRIME CLUB SPECIAL FROM DOUBLEDAY

A RINEHART SUSPENSE NOVEL

Inspector Tibbett of Scotland Yard faces foul play at the flicks when a series of "accidental" deaths shatters a movie company.

FALLING STAR

By PATRICIA MOYES
Author of Murder à la Mode $3.95

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.

CLASSIFIED

Rates $1.00 per Word

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 1749, Orlando, Fla. 32802

MYSTERIES (any books!) bought, sold; sample assortment: 10/7.50; Duane Johnson, Town & Gown Bookseller, 29 Carlisle, Gettysburg, Penna.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

I made $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free Proof. Torrey, Box 3566-T, Oklahoma City 6, Okla.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The fall anthology season is getting off to an early and excellent start. ELLERY QUEEN'S DOUBLE DOZEN (Random, $4.95), the 19th of these annuals, presents highlights from EQMM 1963, and remarkably high they are, with particularly fine entries by Stanley Ellin, John D. MacDonald and Lawrence Treat. THREE TIMES THREE, edited by Howard Haycraft and John Beecroft (Doubleday, $6.50), is an enormous book of almost 400,000 words, containing three of the all-time suspense novels (Raymond Chandler's THE LADY IN THE LAKE, Geoffrey Household's ROGUE MALE and Ngaio Marsh's NIGHT AT THE VULCAN) plus 3 novelets and 9 stories, largely from EQMM, of comparable quality (if not wholly unknown to earlier collections).

★★★★ **FALLING STAR,** ***by Patricia Moyes*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95)

Chief Inspector Henry Tibbett meets the British film industry; and Miss Moyes on the cinema is as rewarding as Miss Marsh (see above) on the theater.

★★★ **THE STRANGE BLUE YAWL,** ***by Lucille Fletcher*** (Random, $3.95)

Odd, unconventional, sometimes exasperating story conceals one of the noblest tricks in fair reader-bamboozlement of the 1960's.

★★★ **FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE,** ***by Harry Kemelman*** (Crown, $3.95)

First novel by an EQMM regular delightfully explores suburban Jewish culture and introduces a grand new detective in Talmudic disputant Rabbi David Small.

★★★ **THE TWO FACES OF JANUARY,** ***by Patricia Highsmith*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Athens and Crete serve as evocative settings for one of those subtle duels of character that Highsmith can bring off so well.

★★★ **MAIGRET'S DEAD MAN,** ***by Georges Simenon*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Maigret's incomparable patience and the rich details of Parisian districts are well served by the lucid translation of Jean Stewart.

Today's spy-obsessed readers will find fascinating accounts of true espionage in SECRETS & SPIES (Reader's Digest-Dutton, $4.95), a collection of essays on World War II from *Reader's Digest* 1942–63.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poet's Note: *Everything we know about this celebrated crime, which has become part of our heritage, we owe to that incomparable reporter and hitherto undisputed authority, Edmund Anonymous. However, independent research among contemporary documents and the trial record itself leads to the unavoidable conclusion that Mr. Anonymous suffered from an inexplicable blindness or prejudice against sparrows.*

WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

by RICHARD M. GORDON

Somebody—who?—killed Cock Robin.
The arrow transfixing his breast
Explains his departure,
But who was the archer?
A sparrow, of course, has confessed.

But sparrows are always confessing.
(They want to be punished, says Freud.)
This claim to the murder
Could not be absurder,
But limelight is greatly enjoyed.

Cock Robin was loved by the ladies,
So one of the suspects was Grouse.
For Robin, while letching,
Displayed his prize etching
To Grouse's adorable spouse.

But Grouse couldn't ever have done it;
He was out with the boys at the time,
And the boys alibi him;
It's useless to try him
For doing the dastardly crime.

Somebody—who?—killed Cock Robin;
Somebody ended his life.
The logical slayer
(Did he not oft betray her?)
Is Mrs. Cock Robin, his wife.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meet a new armchair detective—George Drayton, 73 years old, retired book publisher, devotee of mystery stories—as he becomes involved in his "first case." Old George Drayton's "armchair" is his favorite morning-bench or afternoon-bench in the private park of Knightswood Square; and in following George's park-bench private-eyeing you will get an intimate glimpse of an old (and old-fashioned) Square in the heart of London—in a story charmingly and lovingly told . . .

JUST LIKE INSPECTOR MAIGRET

by VINCENT McCONNOR

THE GREEN PARK IN THE HEART of London, to the passing eye, had not changed in half a century. But to George Drayton, born 73 years ago in a vast bedroom overlooking Knightswood Square, it had been altered in every possible way. Nothing was as it used to be.

He was the second person to enter the Square, fog or shine, every morning. Purdy, the gardener, was always the first, and Mrs. Heatherington the third. Actually she was fourth because her ancient Pekinese, Kwong Kwok, darted through the gate ahead of his mistress. That was how it had been for more than 30 years. Except that the gardener was never there on Sunday or bank holidays. On those days George Drayton was the first.

Every resident of the long rows of identical mansions surrounding Knightswood Square possessed a key which unlocked all the gates in the shoulder-high iron fence. A discreet sign near each gate warned that this was a private park.

George Drayton sniffed the morning air as he stepped out under the white-pillared portico and let the massive front door close itself behind him. He stood for a moment on the broad top step, eyes darting across the sunny Square in search of Purdy. A blue veil of smoke curled at the far northern corner. The gardener would be burning yesterday's accumulation of twigs and dead flowers. He daily raked every path and walk, picked up each fallen leaf and broken branch. Before dusk they were always neatly piled for burning the following morning.

The sun had climbed above the chimneys on the opposite side of the Square, dropping a curtain of haze across the elegant Regency façades so that all he could see was a blur of white columns against shadowed brick. It was going to be a pleasant August day. He would sit on his morning-bench under the protecting branches of the oak tree. There were several favorite benches he occu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pied, depending upon time of year and weather, but never the same bench, morning and afternoon.

George started down the shallow marble steps to the sidewalk and was careful not to drop his books or leather cushion. He carried three books into the park every morning. Today there was a new novel from his own publishing house and two detective novels.

"Morning, sir." Fitch, the caretaker, squinted up the basement steps where he was polishing the brass hand-rail. "Another fine day, sir."

"Splendid." He kept walking or Fitch would come charging up the steps for a chat that could delay him at least ten minutes. On those unfortunate mornings when it was impossible to escape, Mrs. Heatherington and Kwong Kwok always reached the Square ahead of him.

He hesitated at the curb and peered up and down for any moving vehicles. There was only the milkman pulling his small cart at the far end of the street. George walked more briskly as he crossed to the narrow pavement which edged Knightswood Square. Reaching the curb he slowed his steps again and headed for the nearest gate. He rested the cushion and books on the gate post as he felt in his pocket for the key. There was always a moment of panic when he was unable to find it among the jumble of loose objects. Blast! He would have to go all the way back to his flat. Fitch couldn't help him. None of the caretakers were permitted to have keys. Then his fingers touched cold metal and a sigh of relief escaped from his lips.

George unlocked the gate and stepped into the Square. He had made it ahead of the Pekinese.

Before closing the gate he removed his key from the lock and dropped it back into his pocket. Then, in a final burst of speed, he headed for the shaded morning-bench under the oak tree. He placed his leather cushion on the bench and sat on it, arranging the books beside him.

As he filled his first pipe for the day he let his eyes wander over the familiar mansions around the Square. George knew who lived behind every window. He also knew who slept late, who was ill, dying, or convalescent, and which wife had left which husband. His charwoman, Mrs. Higby, kept him informed. Twice a day she reported all the latest news of Knightswood Square. At the moment she complained that nothing much was happening. There had been little worth talking about since last year's murder. That sort of thing didn't happen often enough to please Mrs. Higby.

She came to him for several hours, every day but Sunday, and also did daily work in two other mansions on the Square. Late morning, while he sat in the park, Mrs. Higby would straighten the flat and cook his lunch. He always made his own tea but she would return, after fin-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ishing her other jobs, and prepare his supper before catching a bus home to Putney.

Each day as she served his lunch and supper she reported, with relish, the news of the day. He looked forward to Mrs. Higby's gossip because, otherwise, he would never know what was going on behind his neighbors' windows. It had been exasperating, last winter, when she was kept to her bed with the 'flu. He had hired a woman through an agency but she had known nothing about the other residents of the Square. It was as though his morning and evening papers had not been delivered for three weeks.

Purdy wheeled an empty barrow past, without a word, touching an earthy finger to his leather cap. He never paused for conversation until late in the afternoon.

George watched as the gardener settled down to work, digging at the roots of a rosebush. Then he turned to look across to the south side of the Square, but there was no sign of Mrs. Heatherington and her Pekinese.

He checked his watch. 9:36. Six minutes late! Very likely packing for her holiday. She was taking an afternoon train from Victoria Station to Brighton where her daughter-in-law would be waiting to drive her across to Hove. The old lady spent two weeks every August with her son and his family in their pleasant Georgian house overlooking the distant seashore. Mrs. Higby had described the place to him, in detail, many times; she had heard all about it from her friend, Mrs. Price, who came in twice a week to char for Mrs. Heatherington.

A blur of movement caught his eye at the opposite side of the park and he turned his head to see someone on a bicycle. As his eyes adjusted to the distance he saw that it was Willie Hoskins who, once a month, washed every window facing the Square. Each flat had its regular day for the window cleaner.

Willie braked his bicycle in front of Number 26, hoisted it across the pavement, and propped it against the railing of the basement areaway. Then he lifted a bucket from the handlebar and carried it up the steps to the front door. George could see the flash of color as the sun caught in Willie's red hair, noticed the yellow rubber gloves tucked under the wide leather belt that circled his waist, the faded blue shirt and trousers as the boy went into the house. Boy? He was a married man of 23 with a wife who, according to Mrs. Higby, regularly had him up before a local magistrate on charges of drunkenness, nonsupport, and knocking her about.

The tenants of the Square frequently threatened to dispense with Willie's services, but he would disarm them with his great smile, flashing white teeth and tossing his curly head. It was suspected that Willie was not averse to tossing some of the ladies of Knightswood Square between washing windows. "He's a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complete rascal, he is!" Mrs. Higby would say. "Always leave the front door wide when he does any windows where I be."

George turned to look, once again, for Mrs. Heatherington. She was just coming down the front steps of the mansion where she had a second-floor-front flat. The Pekinese was pulling on his leash, furious at being late, eager to get into the park. He yanked his mistress across the street and when she had unlocked the gate, sprang onto the grass jerking the leather leash out of her hand. The small beast darted to a favorite bush as the old lady closed the gate and dropped the key into her handbag. She crossed to the busy dog and bent stiffly to retrieve his leash. Then, finally, she stood for a moment surveying the Square.

That was when George Drayton looked in another direction. He had no idea whether Mrs. Heatherington could see him from that distance, but he didn't want her to think he was observing her. So he always looked away.

He noticed Willie Hoskins washing a window on the third floor of Number 26—Colonel Whitcomb's flat. A reflection of sunny sky gleamed from two panes he had already finished, but the others were dull with a month's accumulation of London soot. As he watched the window cleaner work he could hear the scuffling sound of Mrs. Heatherington's footsteps approaching down the walk, and as she came nearer he sensed the soft padding of the Pekinese. He turned to look and found that they were much closer than he had anticipated.

The Pekinese stalked past with majestic disdain but his mistress nodded and smiled. George Drayton bowed as usual. They never spoke. In fact, he had never heard Mrs. Heatherington's voice except when she talked to the dog.

George watched them head for the north gate. The old lady paused for a moment to speak to the gardener. Usually she only nodded to Purdy. Probably telling him that she was leaving on holiday. The gardener touched his cap as she continued on her way out of the Square, toward the Old Brompton Road. She would have final errands to do. Small presents for her grandchildren. Very likely a visit to her bank to withdraw money for the two-week holiday.

He wondered how old the dog might be. A Pekinese, named Kwong Kwok, had accompanied Mrs. Heatherington back from China, more than 30 years ago, when she returned to London after the death of her husband. Ever since there had been a Pekinese named Kwong Kwok, but it was impossible that the original dog could have survived so many years. The dog was a constant topic of conversation among the charwomen. To them and to George Drayton all Pekinese looked alike.

The first pram of the day, guided by a uniformed nanny, rolled into the Square as George picked up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his small pile of books. Soon there would be dark clots of nursemaids and prams. Older children would avoid them and keep to the far side of the park where they could run and shout without glares and reprimands from the easily disturbed nannies.

He decided to put off reading the novel from Drayton House. Since his retirement, eight years ago, they had sent him a copy of each new book but, too frequently, he only became upset when he read the pretentious trash his nephew was publishing. No point in getting into a temper on such a beautiful day. He put the book aside and hesitated, deciding between the new Simenon and the new Christie. This would be a perfect morning to read about Paris. Simenon it would be . . .

As he turned to the first page he glanced across the Square to the dirt-encrusted windows of the third-floor flat where last year's murder had taken place. They still remained curtained. The Clarkson flat had never been rented. And the murder remained unsolved.

For two hours he lost himself in a rain-drenched Paris. Inspector Maigret sat in a small café, drinking calvados, listening to neighborhood gossip as he watched a house across the street where a man had been murdered. Home for lunch with Madame Maigret in the apartment on the Boulevard Lenoir, then back through a cold drizzle to the café with its view of the bleak street. Drinking toddy after toddy. Smoking his pipe . . .

George put down the book and filled his own pipe. Why couldn't he sit here and through pure deduction, like Inspector Maigret, solve last year's murder? Except that New Scotland Yard had put their best men on the Clarkson case and they had been unable to find any trace of the murderer.

As George lighted his pipe he noticed Mrs. Higby, parcels clutched in both arms, dart up the front steps of his building. Another hour and she would have the flat in order and his lunch waiting. Wouldn't she be surprised if he announced the name of the Clarkson murderer as he ate his noon chop!

He turned again to study the curtained windows of the murder flat. The victim, young Mrs. Clarkson, had been separated from her husband, but not divorced. Harry Clarkson had an alibi for every minute of the afternoon when his wife was killed. They had found her partially clothed body, sprawled across the bed, one silk stocking twisted around her throat and another stuffed into her mouth. The newspapers said that she had not been attacked sexually.

Clarkson had testified, at the coroner's inquest, that he had not seen his wife in several months. His solicitor sent her a monthly check and, regularly, tried to persuade her that a divorce would be wise; but she had refused to discuss such a possibility.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her char told the police that Mrs. Clarkson entertained many male visitors. She had never seen any of them but, every morning, she had to clean all the ashtrays. Unfortunately, she had no idea how much money Mrs. Clarkson kept in the flat, so there was no way of knowing whether there had been robbery as well as murder. The dead woman's purse, containing a few shillings, was found on her dressing table.

The police reported there had been no fingerprints. All the locals were questioned—caretaker of the building, milkman, florist, laundryman, greengrocer, window cleaner, postman, delivery boy from the chemist shop. Every name in Mrs. Clarkson's address book had been traced and interrogated. Nobody knew anything.

A distant chime of bells brought George Drayton out of his dream of murder. Twelve o'clock. He would finish the Simenon after lunch. As he got to his feet he glanced, once again, at the Clarkson flat. Maigret would have solved the mystery easily, sitting here in the Square, looking up at those curtained windows. But he, George Drayton, didn't have a suspicion of an idea—in spite of all the detective novels he had read and published.

He gathered up his books and leather cushion and headed for the gate. As he walked down the path he noticed that the gardener was already wolfing a sandwich, perched between the handles of his barrow. George looked for Willie Hoskins but the window cleaner had disappeared. All the windows of Colonel Whitcomb's flat gleamed in the noon sunshine, reflecting bright rectangles of blue sky.

Instead of a chop there was cold salmon for lunch which he ate with appetite. He had all his meals at a small table in the study, surrounded by overflowing bookshelves and facing tall windows which overlooked the Square.

Mrs. Higby had her usual morning collection of gossip. "That young American couple what sublet Number 29 are leavin' for Paris next week."

Yes, Maigret would have solved the Clarkson murder without difficulty. Except that now the case was more than a year old and the clues would have long since vanished.

"The old gent in Number 12 is boozin' again. Mr. Mortan, the super, had to help him out of his cab last night. Carry him in to the lift an' up to his flat. I've a lovely bit of Leicester for you."

He studied the curtained windows of the Clarkson apartment, across the Square, as he ate the cheese. Curious that someone—the caretaker or the dead woman's solicitor—wouldn't have those unsightly windows washed.

"Mrs. Heatherington's off this afternoon on holiday. Her an' that ol' dog. This year she's told Mrs. Price, her char, not to come in while

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she's away. Paid her two weeks' wages, she did. Told her to have herself a bit of a rest. Such a fine lady, Mrs. Heatherington."

After lunch George placed his cushion on an afternoon-bench near the northwest corner of the Square, his back to the sun. He filled his pipe again and as he smoked he watched the renewed activity around him.

The gardener was pruning some kind of shrub near the rose arbor. Most of the noisy older children had not reappeared. Probably having an afternoon nap. Several of the nannies had returned with their prams. Or were these different nursemaids? Some of them sat dozing in the warm sunlight.

He noticed that Willie Hoskins was now washing the windows of Mrs. Heatherington's flat. Odd that the old lady would want them cleaned the afternoon she was going away. Except that she had given her char a holiday, so there would be no one, these next two weeks, to let Willie Hoskins or anyone else into the flat.

George opened the Simenon and immediately returned to Paris. He became so absorbed in Maigret's progress that he was no longer aware of the others in the Square. Squealing children ran past him unheeded. The distant chime of bells on the quarter hours did not penetrate to his inner ear. He was conscious only of the sounds and voices of Paris, just as Maigret heard them.

A sudden pentrating scream, shrill and sharp, pulled him back to London and Knightswood Square.

Some of the nursemaids still sat beside their prams. The gardener was sweeping one of the walks. No one in the Square seemed to have noticed the scream he had heard. Or had he heard it? And was the sound human or animal? Perhaps one of the older children playing in the distance? The sound was not repeated.

George raised his eyes to the windows of Mrs. Heatherington's flat. Apparently the window cleaner had finished and gone on to his next job. One of the windows had been left open and the curtains had not been drawn together.

He took out his watch and checked the time. 4:27.

Mrs. Heatherington would have telephoned for a cab and left for Victoria Station long before this. Strange he hadn't noticed her departure. He remembered the scene from other years. Luggage brought down by the cabbie. Last of all, the small wicker hamper containing the Pekinese. He wondered if the old lady had forgotten to shut that window and close the curtains in the flurry of her departure.

He saw that he had finished all but a dozen or so pages of the Simenon. The puzzle in the detective novel was nearly solved.

. . . Maigret was moving quickly now. Each of the clues which had seemed so innocent before, had become ominous as the great French detective linked them together.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Pardon me, sir."

George looked up from his book to see the gardener with a large bouquet of yellow roses in his hand.

"Told Mrs. Heatherington I'd have these for her. Fresh cut. So they'd last till she got to Hove."

"They're very beautiful."

"Said she'd get them before she took off. But I never seen her go."

"Didn't notice her leave, myself. I was reading."

"Guess I'll take them home to the Missus. S'prise the old girl." Purdy held the bouquet in front of him, carefully, as he started back up the walk.

George reopened the Simenon. As he read on, something seemed to shadow the final pages of the book. The printed words faded together and his thoughts wandered.

Why had Mrs. Heatherington forgotten the bouquet of roses?

Yellow roses. He had seen something else that was yellow.

And why hadn't she shut that window before she left on her holiday? And closed those curtains?

. . . Maigret had crossed the street and was climbing the stairs to the floor where the murder had taken place.

There had been no fingerprints in the Clarkson apartment because the murderer had, obviously, worn gloves.

It was a dog that had screamed. George was certain of it now.

Could it have been Mrs. Heatherington's dog? Why would the Pekinese make such a sound? It seldom even barked. Of course there were other dogs in the mansions around Knightswood Square.

. . . Maigret was now standing in the dark hall, outside the murder apartment, listening at the door.

Too bad Mrs. Clarkson had not owned a dog. Might have saved her life.

George glanced across to the curtained windows of the Clarkson flat again. Those dirty windows. Disgraceful.

Dirty windows!

George whirled to look again at Mrs. Heatherington's windows. Something wrong there!

The open window had been completely washed. All its panes sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. And the window next to it reflected blue sky in every rectangle of gleaming glass. But the other two windows were still dull with grime.

Half the windows of Mrs. Heatherington's flat had not been cleaned—

Why?

Had Willie Hoskins seen something inside Mrs. Heatherington's living room? Something that had stopped him in the middle of his job?

And why the devil hadn't the old lady shut that window and closed those curtains before she left to catch her train?

Why had she gone off without that bouquet of roses the gardener had cut for her?

Yellow roses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something else yellow—

The window cleaner's gloves! That was it! Willie Hoskins always wore yellow rubber gloves.

No fingerprints.

Why had the Pekinese screamed?

What possible reason—

"Murder!" The terrible word exploded from his throat. "Murder!" He was on his feet, pointing up at Mrs. Heatherington's open window.

Everyone in Knightswood Square had turned to stare. Purdy was running toward him across the grass.

"Up there! Mrs. Heatherington! Hurry, man! Get the police!"

The gardener, without pausing to ask questions, raced toward the nearest gate, at the southern end of the Square.

George Drayton collapsed onto his leather cushion, exhausted and out of breath. All he would ever be able to remember of the next hours would be a blur of strangers.

Arrival of the first policeman.

Cars screeching to a stop.

Dark-suited men hurrying to Mrs. Heatherington's flat.

The ambulance.

A clutter of curious people gathering on the sidewalk.

White-uniformed figures carrying something down the steps.

His bench surrounded. The dark-suited men. Polite questions. How did he know what had happened? What had he seen? Had he heard something? The dog? Questions ran together until they gave him a headache.

He finally managed to get home to the quiet of his flat where he stretched out gratefully on the sofa in his study. . .

Mrs. Higby wakened him. "You're a hero! Saved the old lady's life, you did! They say another hour an' she'd have been a goner. Just like her dog. Poor little beast. His head bashed in—"

"Mrs. Heatherington? Is she—"

"In hospital. They had to operate. But she's goin' to be fine. I just talked to Mrs. Price, her char, and the police told her. They say the old lady's money was stolen. What she took out of the bank for her holiday. Afraid your supper's goin' to be late this evenin.' "

The telephone rang.

Mrs. Higby hurried to snatch it from the desk. "Mr. Drayton's residence . . . What is it, love? What's happened now? . . . Fancy that!" She turned to pass on her information. "It's me chum, Mrs. Price. They've caught Willie Hoskins! Drunk in a Chelsea pub. The old lady's money still in his pocket." Her eyes widened as she spoke into the phone again. "He didn't! Well, I never."

She turned back toward the sofa. "He's confessed to killin' Mrs. Clarkson last year. I always said he was a rascal."

George Drayton smiled. He had solved the Clarkson case. And he had done it without moving from his bench in Knightswood Square.

. . . Just like Inspector Maigret.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A story set against an unusual and little-known background—the malpais, a fantastic and tortured part of New Mexico, a weird country of black lava rock, needle-sharp, with a twisting, winding trail, and as ghostly as a lunar landscape—a brooding place where mischief, malice, and murder can happen quietly . . .

MYSTERY ON THE MALPAIS

by NEIL M. CLARK

JORAM WEBSTER, KNOWN AROUND the malpais as Ram, sat in the cushioned Boston rocker, his booted feet on the gallery guard-rail, his hat brim pulled low against the glare of the sun. Theodore Roosevelt, the yellow tomcat, lay on an old pillow, its paws in the air and its head turned toward any coolness. New Mexico's sun was blazing away, and dusty cottonwoods along the arroyo looked like "a long time no drink."

Ram's banjo cuddled against his belly, but for half an hour he hadn't touched a string. There had been no new crimes of any account for a long time, and no fresh clues on old ones. He was contriving a song about a *mansador* on a grulla mare that didn't want no rider settin' up there; but Ram's genius was strictly occasional—inspiration had gone holidaying in the cool mountains, rhymes didn't jell, rhythm was halting, and besides, who the hell was busting leather like that from the direction of Dead Burro Springs? For a few minutes Ram had been eyeing the dust cloud suspiciously.

Ram had a large capacity for just sitting when sitting seemed safe, and only his eyes moved now. The nickeled badge on one gallus strap said *Sheriff*. The county seat where his duty calls came from was up yonder aways, a town that boasted two stores, a post office, a gas station, and forty-six inhabitants; and Ram, who disliked towns and crowded pavements and who relied on Effie Bates the telephone girl to keep him informed of emergencies, spent all the time he could on what he called his "country estate."

The signboards a hundred yards up and down the highway said *Websterville*, N.M., Pop. 3—meaning him, T.R., and Predacious the burro, which had a qualified attachment for Ram, a passion for beer slops, and a funny walk when he was drunk.

"Elkins horse, looks like," Ram reflected. A car traveling at an illegal speed passed on the state highway like a hasty smile, and the approaching rider crossed close be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hind it. "Little tyke up. Could be Cindy Ann."

And Cindy Ann it was. Pigtails tossed on the tiny rider's head as the big horse skidded to a stop in front of Ram. The Sheriff eyed the hot and homely little face on which life had not yet written any messages of importance, and said, "You look to be in some of a hurry, Cindy Ann Elkins, Miss."

She nodded. "Pa,"—breathlessly —"is in the well."

"How's that again?"

"He can't get out. Ma's gone. Wants you to come."

"A course he does, Cindy Ann, a course! And what's keepin' your Pa in the well? How come he—?"

"Dunno. Lookin' for something on a paper. That man has it."

"Sounds kind of mixed up, young lady."

"Yes, ma'am. Pa's rope is down the well. Ma thinks he's a killer. That's why."

"I see."

Not seeing, but convinced that something needed looking into, Ram set his banjo inside and ambled off the gallery. He picked up his throwing rope on the way, tightened the gun in his official holster, and strode high-heeled to the horse corral out back.

Predacious the burro, occupying as much space in front of the gate as so small a beast could, was nuzzling noses with a palomino mare he was temporarily in love with, and displayed no intention of moving. Ram aimed a kick at him and connected, and Predacious aimed one at him but missed.

"You been doin' too much drinkin' lately," Ram grumbled, shoving the stubborn little brute, which raised desert echoes with a lovelorn heehaw. In the corral Ram threw his $80 saddle on the big dun, Charley, and within minutes was drinking the wind after Cindy Ann, who was already streaking for home.

The Elkins ranch was lonely and hidden-away, a long three miles from Websterville by horse trail and 27 rough miles any other way. The trail skirted the malpais, a secrets-keeping stretch of brooding black lava—a place where mischief, malice, murder, and much else could happen quietly.

Indians, stagecoach robbers, killers on the dodge, and horse thieves in their day had found the malpais a handy sanctuary, and more than one cross-country tourist, stopping to stretch car-weary legs and see New Mexico's strange sights, had turned a corner in there and been lost for days. Ram knew his way around in that tortured piece of country as well as most honest men, and he liked it less than not at all.

He soon caught up with Cindy Ann, but asked her no questions while they were on the flats where they could make time. Her Dad, he knew, was Daniel Elkins, a conscientious, reliable rancher, finally starting to cash in on what old-timers considered a coppered bet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What kind of a tight, Ram wondered, could the rancher have gotten himself into?

For years, before Elkins and his Texas-born wife, Martha, had moved in, the ranch had been unoccupied and unused because of remoteness, worn-down pastures, and water difficulties. Daniel had come to it with big ideas four-five years earlier, dredged tanks in convenient places to catch rainwater runoff, chained off the worst scrub cedar and pinon, hired a plane to scatter seed, gave the grass a chance to come back, and already, with the aid of a couple of lucky rainy seasons, he was running nearly two hundred wet cows on the dozen or so sections.

Daniel Elkins was considered a hard worker. Most people, though, thought he wouldn't have made it half so well without the brains and muscles of his wife. Martha Elkins was a boss cook, a clever handler of the dollar bill, and as good a ranch hand any day as a full-time hired cowboy.

"Where's your Ma off to?" Ram asked Cindy Ann while they were walking their horses up a rise in the trail.

"Dunno. Maybe that man—"

"What man is this, Cindy Ann?"

"He's got red hair and pock marks."

"Sure enough?" The description, meager but vivid, gave a tiny nudge to some lurking recollection in the Sheriff's head, and prodded the curiosity that was always clicking under Ram's big hat. "What else do you know about him?"

"Nothin'. He dropped Pa's rope."

"Down the well?"

"Yep."

"While your Pa was down there?"

"Yep."

"Accidental?"

"Nope."

"A-purpose?"

"Yep."

"Sure of that?"

"Course!"

"Kind of careless, seems." Cindy Ann nodded. "Where is he now—this man?"

She shrugged ignorance. "I was off when it happened, ropin' mountain lions."

"Well to goodness. Catch any?"

"Nope. Snakes."

They came to the rim where the valley spread out below. The trail leading down was steep and narrow, and they took it in single file. Ranch buildings and corrals lay close to the trail at the bottom, near a bluff which helped to break the everlasting winds and offered some shelter. The ranch well that Cindy Ann claimed her Pa was in, was about halfway from the kitchen door to the horse corral. It was a dug well and a deep one, Ram recollected, near a hundred feet to water. He couldn't remember when it had been dug: it went back further in time than he did. Indians at slave labor, he supposed, could have dug it for gold-hungry conquistadores, and it was said there had always been water in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. Daniel Elkins had installed plastic pipe and a jet pump to bring the water up to a pressure tank. Before that, getting water up for house use was a hand job and a rough chore.

Ram dropped his reins and strode to the edge of the well. The slab cover had been removed and was lying off to one side. The Sheriff knelt on the modern cement coping and peered down in.

Gradually his eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he was able to see a glimmer of water far below. "Dan'l," he yelled, "you there?"

A voice that sounded faint and very tuckered-out answered from a long ways down. "That you, Ram?"

"'s right."

"For God's sake if you got a rope get it down here to me, will you?"

"I got an eighty-foot one. That long enough?"

"Just barely."

"I'll let her down. Can you help yourself any?"

"Expect so. I'll tie it around me. Take it real slow. This well is rocked in all the way to where I'm at."

"Are you in the water?"

"Not quite. Damn near."

"How do you plan to work it?"

"I can get bootholds and backholds and climb push-up-like if I got the rope to hang onto and you give me some pull. I just don't want to slip and drop in the water. Mainly, if you'll steady me—"

"Good! I'll give you all the pull I can."

It took fifteen minutes of puff-pull-and-climb to get Daniel Elkins out of that deep dank hole, and it was a winded Sheriff and a weary cowman who took seats for a breather on the well cover in the sun.

"Holy hens!" Elkins shivered. "It was cold down there."

"I'll bet!" The Sheriff eyed him curiously, but before asking any of the questions that were pushing one another around in his head, he took time to fill his pipe and let the near victim get his breath back and some warmth into his chilled bones. When he judged Elkins was reasonably ready, he said, "Cindy Ann kind of suggested there was something funny about you being left down there?" It was half question, half statement.

"Ram," said the rancher, "seems like a feller grown up and my age ought to smell a skunk before he raises his tail. Me, I didn't. Martha was smarter. She did. I don't know all the particulars, but while I was holdin' on down there, thinking and guessing, I concluded it sure is *damn* funny. You know what that feller did when he dropped the rope? He laughed. I thought at first it was an accident. But he laughed, damn it! And then he went away. He had got me down there and figured to let me stay and rot. Why, I dunno. I expected a bullet."

"Seems like you better tell the whole story, don't you reckon?"

Elkins had sun-puckered eyes and wasn't the type to do his talking first and afterwards think what he should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have said. He sat silent for a while rubbing a rope-burned palm.

Finally he said, "Don't see nothing else to do now, Ram. Figured it was a deal I could handle myself, me and this feller, and say nothing to anybody else about it. He offered me a nice piece of change if I'd help—money I could well use. It was honest enough—at least, I think it was. Martha thought different. She said it stunk. She said he stunk. She didn't trust the feller one inch."

"Where *is* Martha?"

"That's what I'd like to know. She was in the house when I started to climb down in there. Far as I know, she didn't have no special call to go anywhere. When he dropped that rope down on me, and left—"

"I'd like to hear about that, Dan'l. Sounds to me like a fool stunt, going down there on a rope."

Elkins took his time before replying. "You see," he said at last, "the stuff this feller wanted to get at was about fifty feet down the well, he said, on a natural ledge—sort of a blowhole, the way he described it. He said I couldn't miss seeing it. They used to go down to it with a rope ladder, he said. We didn't have no such a thing or means to make it, but I figured I could get down all right on a knotted rope fastened to a stake pin—"

Ram was shaking his head dubiously.

"I did it once in a mine shaft," said Elkins. "But I clumb and clumb and couldn't see no such a ledge, and he kept calling down to go just a little further. Then, when I was plumb at the end of the rope, he did *that*—"

Elkins indicated the stake pin with a rope-end that was frazzled where it had been hacked with a knife and cut in two.

"When he dropped that rope down on me, of course I knew I was in an awful pickle, especially when he laughed and left me yelling. I fixed myself so I wouldn't fall and kept right on hollering. Cindy Ann finally heard me, seemed like a long time later. I told her to run and fetch her Ma. She came back and said her Ma wasn't to be found. That's when I sent her for you."

"Hmm!" Ram pocketed his filled pipe without lighting it, and started chewing on a stem of grama grass. He knew pretty well when he could hurry a man and when to let him go his own gait, and he was beginning to put things together and nurse a very curious idea.

"Cindy Ann didn't seem to know much about this feller," the Sheriff said. "Who is he? Any business of mine, knowin'?" He observed Daniel's quick look off toward the malpais, and the tightening of his lips, and waited patiently for an answer. And waited.

It was a long time before the cowman said anything more at all, and when he did, it was off the track. "Ram, you've been around here a long time—lots longer'n I have."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Fifty-some summers, Dan'l. Twice as many winters, seems."

"You've been Sheriff how long?"

"Sheriff and deputy, more'n a quarter century."

"You must know all about most of the folks here. You'd hear the stories, I guess."

"Such as got circulated."

"Remember a man—" Elkins seemed to hesitate—"named Hempstead?"

"Barney Hempstead? Sure, I knew Barney. Came out to this country from Texas quite a lot of years ago, about the time I was of a size to begin getting ideas about girls. He was pretty old when he died. Been dead some time now."

"Hempstead shot himself?"

Ram threw his grass stem away. "That's what the coroner laid it to."

"Didn't he?"

"I had a few doubts. No proof. You see, Barney was found shot at his place over on the other side of the malpais, down Gunderson's road. You know what that country is like. Plenty lonely. He had been dead and layin' some time before he was found. Gun was beside him. Rifle. It looked like a suicide set-up. I was some bothered at the time, because you know how hard it is to be sure what kind of a gun a slug comes from, especially if it's smashed. The slug that Doc dug out of Hempstead, *he* said was from a rifle. And there was a rifle right there. Me, I was kind of sure it came from a hand gun. Neither of us was positive. I still have the slug—"

"Did Hempstead—" Elkins seemed to tense up—"was he pretty well fixed? Did he leave much property?"

"Was supposed to have a good share of means. Seems he should have had. But seemingly he didn't. All that ever turned up was a few horses and mainly just the fixings he had at his home place. Barney never owned any land to speak of. He leased his pasture from the government. Seemed strange he didn't have more laid by 'n he did. He'd ranched here a long time, then sold off all his cows for cash, year or two before—said he was getting too old to run 'em right. He should have had a fair pile, everybody thought. But there was just a few hundreds in the bank. He played some poker. Could have gambled and lost it. Probably had debts. I don't know. Nobody knew."

Elkins was slow bringing out his next question. "Could he have had a pile and hid it, and nobody knew where to look for it?"

Ram's eyes narrowed. He picked another grama stem before he spoke. "Could be, I reckon. Why? You hear something along those lines, Dan'l?"

"Sort of." He jumped to his feet. "Ram, I'm worried. I've got to see where Martha has got to. She wouldn't just go off without saying anything. Do you suppose this feller—?"

"I been kind of wondering,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dan'l." The Sheriff got to his feet too.

"Martha was dead against him right from the start. I couldn't understand why. She wouldn't hardly listen to what I told her about him, so I didn't tell her too much. She wouldn't have him in the house to eat at table with us. She was against me having anything to do with his scheme."

"Scheme?"

"Deal we figured out. I thought it was sensible, and honest. He had this legal paper. And as long as Hempstead used to live here—"

"Hempstead lived *here*?"

"What the feller said. Hempstead and his son, until the son went back to Oklahoma." He saw Ram shaking his head soberly. "Didn't they?"

"Far as I know, Dan'l, and I sure ought to, Hempstead never lived here or even near. This was clear off his range. He operated on the other side of the malpais. What's more, he didn't have any son. Far as anybody knew, he never was even married. No son lived with him, anyhow."

Elkins gave the Sheriff a long slow stare of unbelief. At last his eyes fell. When he spoke again, his voice was low and throaty. "Now I *know* I got to find Martha. That damn skunk! Will you help me look for her, Ram?"

"Seems like a good idea."

They searched inside the house and out, but found no sign of the missing wife. Elkins made sure that none of the horses was missing, and the pickup truck was in the shed where it belonged. He pointed to a bedroll and saddle against the corral fence. "Them's his." He also singled out a bay horse in the corral. "That's his too."

"He didn't calculate to go far away, seems."

Elkins nodded agreement.

Neither of the men spotted the telltale flitch of blue cloth. Cindy Ann's sharp eyes did that. It was a tiny bit, little more than an inch long, ripped or cut, edged with ragged threads.

"Looky, Pa," she said, "that's off of Ma's bandanna."

Elkins took it. "Could be, Sis. Where did you find it?"

She showed him. The spot was well away from the house, in the direction of a break in the lava that marked the beginning of a faint but passable trail into the forbidding malpais.

"What," said the rancher wonderingly, "would your Ma be doing way out here? Martha—" to the Sheriff—"didn't have any kind of business that would call her to come out this way." He explained further that Martha always carried blue bandannas in her work pants. His own were red.

Ram examined the scrap. "This stuff don't tear easy," he said. "Looks like it might of been torn a-purpose. Could be Martha was in a tight and wanted to leave a sign."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Babes in the woods!" Cindy Ann shrilled, adding, "In a book."

Then they found the tracks. There was only one set, but these told a story: two fresh tracks in a spot of soft earth, a man's and a woman's.

"That's Martha," said Elkins. "She wears them sneakers around the house."

The man's bootprint partly overlay the sneaker print. "Way it looks," said Ram, "Martha was going first, he followed." Elkins nodded soberly. "Would seem he was driving her into the malpais, likely marching her ahead of his gun. I reckon you might go get your gun, Dan'l, before we follow them in there."

The rancher was back in a minute with his rifle as well as a hand gun stuck in his hip pocket; but Ram, he found, was in no big rush to hurry off. "We might straighten out a thing or two, Dan'l," the Sheriff said. "This stranger, was he red-headed, like Cindy Ann said, and pock-marked?"

"That's right."

"Seem to know the country?"

"Claimed not to. Said he was from Oklahoma. Said he'd never been this far west before. That's what he said when he first came. He asked a lot of questions about the malpais. Asked if I'd ever heard of Adam Diggings. Asked if I'd ever been to the ice caves. From things he said later, though, I judged he might not be too ignorant about the malpais. That was after he told me what he was really here for—"

"The stuff in the well?" Elkins nodded. "He told you Hempstead hid his money there?" Again the rancher nodded. "Did he claim it belonged to him?"

"No, he said he came to get it for his cousin, Fred. Hempstead's son. That was the part that he had the paper about, and he showed me. That's why I believed him. He claimed Fred Hempstead was in an automobile accident and almost killed several years ago. It left him crippled so it was hard for him to get around. Fred always knew where his Pa's money was, it seems, but for a long time he never told anybody. Figured in time he would come and get it himself. But he never was able to. When he finally got to where he needed cash awful bad, he sent Short for it."

"Short—that what the feller called himself?"

The rancher nodded. "Len Short."

Ram pushed his hat back and rubbed his forehead. "Was he tall and spindling, taller'n me?"

"Six-foot-three, I'd say, and didn't throw no shadow to speak of."

"Teeth messed up—crooked?"

"That's right. You know him, Ram?"

"Expect so. Sounds like a feller I'm thinking of—feller who used to work on ranches around here. He worked for Hempstead once, I recollect."

"He said he hadn't seen Hempstead, who was his uncle, except once when he was a youngster."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He'd seen him, if he's who I'm thinking. Knew him well enough, and no uncle business. Knew the malpais, too. Fact is, that's where we caught him. We had to use dogs. He'd tried to rob the bank at High Thorps, but only got a few dollars and was recognized. Just about that time—" the Sheriff eyed Elkins through slit lids—"Hempstead shot himself."

The rancher stared. "You think?—"

"Could be, Dan'l. And maybe I've got what'd prove it."

The two headed thoughtfully into the malpais. They tried to go quietly. This was not easy on iron-nailed heels. Loose lava rock the size of hailstones was lying everywhere and crunched underfoot at every step. The malpais was needle-sharp.

Ram recalled how a deputy had been lamed for life from a tumble in it. The trail didn't go straight, but turned and twisted among hummocks heaped fantastically just as the hot lava had piled itself up when it began to cool centuries before.

It was spooky country, and seemed lifeless. Scrub cedars grew where wind-blown soil had lodged, but they were gnarled and crooked, and attained no size to speak of. The roots, Ram knew, sometimes traveled hundreds of feet in search of soil and moisture. It was never possible to see far ahead or far back.

But there was no chance of missing the trail. Though precarious underfoot, it did not branch or split. The black menace folded itself closer and closer around them as they went, gathering them into what might have been a ghostly lunar landscape.

"Look there, Dan'l!" Ram spoke quietly, and pointed.

It was another scrap of the blue bandanna. They stopped a moment to examine it. The rancher's lips thinned. "Martha's sure letting us know she headed this way. They wouldn't a had to go far in here if this Short meant to—"

Elkins didn't finish. Ram nodded. The Sheriff had been thinking uneasily of the potholes filled with scummy dead water which they kept passing at intervals. A cow could fall into one of them and never a sign show. A human, too.

The shot was a sharp crack. They ducked instinctively. But it was some distance off. They knew it couldn't have been meant for them. If not, for whom?

A black crow, perhaps disturbed by the shot, flapped overhead, cawing raucously as it went. They waited for a second shot. It didn't come. Grimly they went on, faster than before.

"Do you think—" Elkins began.

Ram shook his head and put up a finger for silence.

They came to a stretch of trail that lay open and straight ahead for a hundred feet. Ram signaled to stop and listen. The silence was deathly. The malpais seemed to lie brooding in the sun, challenging all living things to be quiet.

They started on. All at once there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was plenty of noise—too much. A man's voice, yelling. A woman's. They listened a moment, then ran. Around a stack of lava, Ram stopped so suddenly that Elkins, following, crashed into him.

Ahead of them was as queer a sight as Ram remembered seeing in all his days of sheriffing. A rope's length away, a slight five-foot woman was hanging onto the back of a six-foot-three skeleton-thin man, her arms around his neck, her legs around his waist, her hands holding onto both of his for dear sake, so that the barrel of the gun he had could point in only one direction, straight up.

Ram saw what must have happened; she had jumped on him from a ledge in a flying tackle. The man was twisting, wriggling, trying desperately to shake her off. She wouldn't shake. To add to his misery, she had grabbed a hank of his hair in her teeth and had yanked his head back so all the sound he could make was a strangled-rooster whoop.

"Hold him!" Ram yelled, and ran.

Within seconds the rescuers were in command. Elkins wrenched the gun out of the bedeviled man's hands. Ram's gun was pointing at his belly. The woman let go and slid off his back. She was red-faced, ruffled, puffing, and looked thoroughly mad and bursting to talk.

"You *would* listen to this—this heathen beanpole!" she said. "If I hadn't run when he fell, and hid, and then jumped him, he'd a made a fresh meat carcass of me long before this. How come—" sputtering—"you ain't drowned in the well like he said?"

"Cindy Ann," Daniel said sheepishly.

"What about Cindy Ann?"

"She went and fetched Ram. He hauled me out."

"Mister," she turned to the Sheriff, "we've been needing law more here since Tuesday a week than in five years previous. This darning needle—"

Ram nodded. "I'm acquainted with him, ma'am. His name ain't Short, like he said. Remember me, Mister *Long?* Last time I had the pleasure of your company, I was signin' you over to the warden at Santa Fe. Your time is just up, I guess. So you hurried back to get the loot you left there after killing the old man, didn't you? Looks like I'd be taking you up there again. They don't come out so quick when it's murder."

The captured man, red-faced and puffing, swallowed hard. "I killed somebody? You're crazy! Who?"

Without replying, Ram stuck out his hand for the man's gun. "I'll hold that, Dan'l,' he said. "Suppose you rip his shirt off, will you? It's about all we got to tie him up with. Then we'll head back and look into this some more."

Later, a search of the captive and his bedroll disclosed nothing new. "Reckon some of his story is true," Ram said. "Reckon Hempstead's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money *is* down the well. But it's a good bet Barney never put it there."

Martha was staring at the Sheriff open-mouthed. "*Whose* money?"

"Barney Hempstead's, ma'am."

"Is that whose money he came for?" The Sheriff nodded. "Daniel never mentioned that name to me."

"You didn't ask. You wasn't interested," said Elkins.

"That's who it was, I reckon, ma'am. Seems it must have been. Hempstead was a rancher who was shot and killed on his place over yonder several years ago, before you folks arrived. 'Twas judged a suicide at the time. I've an idea we can prove, now, it was a killing."

"And this fellow did it?"

"I wouldn't doubt."

"And he dizzied Daniel into looking for money he stole?"

Ram nodded.

"Proves what I said all along!" Martha turned abruptly and marched off toward the house.

Once more the rancher climbed into the well, with the Sheriff standing by to help. He didn't go down far. This time, at a point easily reached by a ladder with hooks caught over the well coping, he spotted the hiding place. A boulder in the wall of the well had evidently been removed and put back at least once before with fresh cement. Daniel loosened the cement again and removed the boulder.

"It's here!" he called up to Ram.

"What is it?"

"Mason jars, I'd say. Two of 'em. Honey jars or jam—I don't know which." He passed them up.

The jars were thick with dust. The metal lids were rusted and wouldn't unscrew. But through the glass they could glimpse what certainly had once been U.S. greenbacks. Moisture obviously had gotten in and left them mildewed and matted.

"We'll leave 'em like they are," Ram said. "Evidence. Might even be fingerprints. Likely we'll have to ship 'em to Washington before we're through. They've got experts down there, I hear, that can identify a dollar bill after a cow has swallowed it. Yes, ma'am?"

Martha marched back from the house holding something in her hand. "Take a look at this, mister," she said, a gleam in her eyes as she handed Ram what he took to be a faded family photograph, evidently taken years before. "See if there's anybody there you'd know if you saw 'em."

Ram wiped his hands and handled the picture gingerly. He saw a stiffly posed group standing in front of what looked like a pioneer's sod house. It included an elderly man, bearded, perhaps in his seventies; two younger men, probably in their early forties; a woman, possibly in her late twenties; and three small children. The smallest child was a girl, the others boys.

"That," Martha told the Sheriff, "is our family, taken when I was seven. There's Grandpa,"—point-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing. "That's my Pa and Ma, me and my two brothers. Anybody among 'em you might ever have known, mister?"

Ram was cautious. "This was taken quite a spell back, ma'am."

"Forty years ago, almost."

"Folks do change. You," he said, smiling, "are some different."

"Growed up is all. Had more brains then."

"Kind of doubt that!" The Sheriff pointed to one of the two younger men. Martha's eyes were bright as he did so. "That one," he said judicially, "might be somebody I once knowed."

"That," Martha said, "was one of my uncles. He left Texas about the time this picture was taken, aiming to go further west. We weren't any of us much hands for writing, and we lost track of him."

The Sheriff was keeping right up with her. "And what was your Ma's name before she was married, Martha?"

"Hempstead."

"And your uncle's first name?"

"Bernard—known as Barney."

Ram shook his big head wonderingly. "Don't that just beat the band!" he said.

Daniel was goggling. "You never told *me* your Ma's name was Hempstead."

"You never asked, never was interested. All you wanted was Miss Martha Bacon. I recollect you bragged more'n once you didn't marry any woman's kinfolk."

Ram was studying it out. "Mr. Long here," he reflected aloud, "he shoots your uncle—"

"I did not!"

"Robs him—"

"Now you listen here—"

"—plants the stuff where he thinks it will be safe from now on—"

"You can't prove a thing!"

"—comes back to get it and finds the place lived in. What's more, though he couldn't know that, it's occupied by somebody the money really belongs to. I reckon you *are* your uncle's heir, ain't you, ma'am?"

"Should think so. My brothers and me."

Daniel Elkins, popeyed, broke in. "And Short — Long — offered me two hundred dollars if I'd climb down to get Martha's money — for *him*. Why, you—"

"Hold your horses, Dan'l. You're powerful lucky, I'm thinking. He could easy have shot you when he got you down and dropped the rope. But he thought you'd keep. He didn't want to warn Martha by a shot, seems."

On the way to the lockup with his prisoner an idea for another song kept trying to emerge through the rhapsodic fog under Ram Webster's big hat. It had to do with a mountain cat that jumped plumb onto a feller's back and didn't exhibit a bit of tact. But it was not the day for Ram's lyrical genius to flower. He decided for the time being to give his prime attention to the sheriffing business.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Our favorite collaboration of amateur criminologists (fictional, of course), still on a round-the-world cruise aboard the Valhalla, still accompanied by their lovely and charming wives, and still bumping into provocative mysteries wherever they may roam—but this time, in Papeete, in the exotic South Seas, something new has been added . . .

THE TAHITIAN POWDER BOX MYSTERY

by JAMES HOLDING

FROM A PORTHOLE ON THE *Valhalla's* sundeck a bare, slender, human arm suddenly appeared, thrust outward from the shoulder. The hand at the end of the arm tilted a round shallow box and dumped the contents casually into the purple swells that sucked at the ship's seaward side as she lay alongside the dock in Papeete.

Then the arm withdrew, having first paused briefly to tap the cardboard container against the ship's side and thus dislodge the final clinging grains of the box's contents.

Nobody saw this happen the first time.

But on the upper sundeck, directly above the porthole, the Danforths and Leroys stood at the ship's rail, raptly regarding the spectacular Tahitian sunset that was now painting the sky behind Moorea with gold and vermilion. And Helen Leroy, sniffing delicately, said, "You may not believe it, but this is absolutely the first perfumed sunset I ever saw. Or smelled, rather."

"Perfumed?" her husband asked absently, watching the changing colors of sky and sea.

"Yes, perfumed. Don't you smell it?"

"I do," Carol Danforth said, also sniffing. "And it's not any cheap, tawdry, domestic perfume, either. That's Chanel Number Five in my opinion. And my opinion is pretty expert!"

King Danforth said, "Are you out of your mind? Tahiti is reputedly romantic, I admit. But *perfumed* sunsets!"

"I smell it, too," Leroy said with surprise. "Take a deep breath, King. The girls are right."

Danforth followed instructions. "So I smell something nice," he conceded. "Flowers on the island perhaps? Frangipani? Jasmine?"

"That's Chanel Number Five," Carol insisted. And sneezed.

Martin Leroy sneezed, too. "Chanel, maybe," he said then, "but powder, not perfume. Look. That's what's making us sneeze."

He pointed to a mist of fine particles being lifted in a fragrant cloud

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over the rail by a gentle updraft of the sunset breeze.

Danforth said, "Somebody must be jettisoning bath powder out of her porthole somewhere below us."

"Who'd throw away Chanel powder, I'd like to know?" Helen said indignantly. "Let me look." She stretched up on her toes and leaned out over the rail. They all stared downward.

As they watched, an arm and hand emerged from the porthole below them and emptied the contents of a box into the sea. A light cloud of powder quickly dispersed on the air. When the arm withdrew, Leroy said, "That's one way to cut your inventory in a hurry."

"If you don't care about your overhead," quipped Danforth as Leroy sneezed once more.

"I think it's a vulgar gesture," Helen said. "Why not just quietly put the box of powder in her cabin wastebasket if she wants to get rid of it?" She turned to Carol. "I wonder who she is?"

Carol tossed her dark head. "I'll count the portholes from the back of the ship and find out," she said.

"Later," Danforth interposed. He glanced at his watch. "We've got to get moving. The dinner tour for Les Tropiques is supposed to gather on the dock right now."

"Then let's go," Leroy said with enthusiasm. "We don't want to miss the dancing girls!"

The Tahitian dancing girls were very good. Even Helen and Carol admired their grace, sinuosity, and curiously Caucasian beauty. And the dinner at Les Tropiques restaurant was very good, too.

Their table was set in a corner of the wide terrace that faced the lagoon. As they ate, darkness gradually dimmed the outlines of the terrace and hid the faint line of white surf breaking over the reef, far out. Down the coast to their right, festive strings of colored lights marked the *Valhalla* at her pier. At full dark, native boys with torches in their hands came and lighted oil lamps around the edges of the terrace to illuminate the wild, hip-swaying movements of the Tahitian dance troupe.

Danforth breathed a sigh of purest satisfaction and said, "I never thought I'd live to see the day that a travel folder understated the case for a tourist attraction."

"I take it you like Tahiti," Helen said, laughing. She looked at the dancers in their grass skirts and straw bras, their bare golden flesh burnished by the leaping flare of the oil lamps, and she smiled at Carol.

"Like it?" said Danforth. "It gets me right here." He tapped his chest.

John Rich, a fellow passenger from the *Valhalla*, was sitting at the next table with three loquacious widows. He leaned over and said with a grin, "I heard that, Mr. Danforth. And how right you are! Isn't this great?"

Rich was a bachelor, slim, dark-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyed, fortyish, with formal good manners but a slightly raffish air. He was very popular with the *Valhalla* passengers, especially the unattached women. It was rumored he had been the chauffeur-houseman of a recently deceased Detroit industrialist who had remembered him generously in his will. This cruise, the ship's gossip ran, was in the nature of a celebration of his newfound independence.

Leroy replied, "It's great, all right. We can't afford to go too far overboard, though—not with our wives sitting here with us!"

Rich laughed and indicated his table companions. "I haven't got a wife," he said, "but my harem, here, is trying to make me put on the brakes. I've already warned them that I'm striking out on my own right after dinner!"

"Good hunting," Leroy said.

The dinner party broke up just then in a burst of applause for the native dancers.

Quinn's, the most famous saloon in the South Seas, was a madhouse when they arrived some time later. Almost every able-bodied passenger from the *Valhalla* was there, it seemed, and a raucous mob of French, Polynesians, Melanesians, Orientals, and mixtures thereof swelled the uproar. Everybody in the place appeared to be either laughing shrilly, shouting for drinks, beating beer glasses on the scarred table tops, singing drunkenly, or publicly romancing the unashamed native B-girls.

The Danforths and Leroys found a table as far from the bar as possible and ordered stingers.

They were no sooner seated than Carol said, "There's John Rich over there."

They looked across the wide room and saw John Rich standing at the end of the bar. He was talking to a barefooted Polynesian girl clad in a low-cut island dress of figured red cotton. The girl's long straight hair poured down her back like a black waterfall.

"He's found himself a Polynesian houri, I see," Leroy said dreamily. "And not bad, either!"

Danforth said, "You know what? That girl with Rich is one of the girls who were selling flowers on the porch of Les Tropiques when we came out."

"You must have studied her with considerable care to be able to recognize her across a mad place like this at forty paces," Helen teased him. "For the life of me, I can't see what's so terribly attractive to you men about bare feet and long straight black hair." Helen was an ethereally lovely blonde.

"Bare feet!" Leroy laughed. "Are her feet bare, too?"

Danforth said, "She reminds me of something."

"Of what?" This was from Carol. "Whistler's mother?"

With studied restraint Danforth answered, "No, but something rath-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er curious. After dinner I waited on the porch of Les Tropiques while you three visited the washrooms, remember? John Rich came out of the restaurant while I was waiting. He stopped on the porch and said something to that girl he's with over there. She was selling flowers then."

"Asking her for a date," said Helen. "He said he was going a-wolfing. What's strange about that?"

"He was speaking Italian," Danforth said softly.

"Italian?" Leroy raised his eyebrows. "You sure?"

"Or Latin."

"John Rich speaking Latin?" Carol hooted.

"Maybe his real name is Ricci," Leroy hazarded, "in which case he might know Italian."

"True," said Danforth. "But what about the girl? Would *she* know Italian?"

"What makes you think she did?"

"She understood him — at least, she answered him without a moment's pause. In English. But the last word of Rich's question to her—that's all I heard—was definitely not in English. It was either Italian or Latin."

"What was the last word?"

"*Acuminata*. That's what he said. With a rising inflection, hence a question."

Leroy slapped the table and laughed. "I've always told you, King, if you want to be a well-rounded mystery novelist you should learn a little about everything—including botany. Only a modicum, mind you, but *something* about the flowers and fruits and—er—flora of our teeming planet."

"What are you drinking, Mart?" Helen asked sweetly. "Ambrosia? The birds and the bees will be next, no doubt."

"And I can't think of a better place than Tahiti for *that* lecture!" Carol added.

"Quiet, children," said Danforth, "your elders are speaking. Why flora, Mart?"

"And why not Cora, Dora, and Nora, if it comes to that?" Carol laughed.

"Because," Leroy pointed out patiently, "if you knew anything about the flora of these islands, King, you'd recognize that the Italian word you overheard John Rich using was merely a descriptive adjective, part of the botanical name for a genus of the frangipani plant."

"You're kidding," Danforth said.

"Not at all. I believe the full term is *plumeria acuminata*—meaning the sharp or pointed frangipani. White. As distinguished, let us say, from *plumeria rubra*, which is simply red jasmine flowers to us learned botanists." Leroy preened himself.

His wife exclaimed in astonishment, "Why, Mart, you never told me you knew so much about flowers! Will you address our garden club when you get home?"

"Gladly." Leroy bowed. "You

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can sign me up now by buying me another drink."

"Wait a minute," Danforth protested. He rubbed a hand over his crew-cut. "So Rich wasn't speaking Italian. But I still think it was odd for Rich to ask about the pointed frangipani, or whatever you called it, by its scientific name, don't you?"

Leroy nodded seriously. "You wouldn't think the average retired-type chauffeur from Detroit would know there was such a thing as frangipani, let alone what its correct botanical designation is."

Helen, who had been watching Rich across the saloon, spoke up. "New song title: 'He asked for *plumeria acuminata*, but he got red jasmine instead.' That lei around his neck is woven of pink flowers."

"If you would only let me finish," Danforth said, "I can explain that, too. In answer to Rich's question about *acuminata*, that girl over there stood up from among the flower sellers on the restaurant porch and said to Rich, 'Good evening, Monsieur, wouldn't you like this better?' And she hung that red jasmine lei around his neck, and they went off together, arm in arm."

"Just like that?" Helen asked.

"Just like that. So *she* picked *him* up, if you want my opinion, not the other way around."

"The hussy!" said Carol, waving across the room to John Rich and his companion. "How fascinating! Maybe they will join us."

She invited them to do so in vigorous sign language. Rich said something to the native girl in the red dress. She shook her head and turned back to the bar. Rich spread his hands in apology to Carol, then put his arm around the girl's bare shoulders. She turned a cool, remote smile on him then. But she seemed to be looking beyond him toward the door.

For the next two days King Danforth and Martin Leroy, known to millions of mystery story fans as the author, "Leroy King," were so completely occupied with sightseeing and shopping in Tahiti that neither they nor their wives gave another thought to *plumeria acuminata* or Chanel Number Five bath powder.

It wasn't until the *Valhalla* was steaming out of Papeete harbor bound for Suva in the Fijis, that Carol Danforth, sipping her preprandial gimlet, said, "And now that we're back to normal shipboard scandal, I'm still curious to know who was throwing away Chanel bath powder the other day."

"I'm astonished at your ladylike patience," Leroy commented. "I thought you'd have found out who she was long since."

Danforth lit a cigarette. "One thing is fairly obvious," he said idly, but with a challenging glance at his partner. "She isn't just an amateur powder-dumper, this gal. She's a professional."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How do you reach that obscure conclusion?" Leroy asked.

"It leaps to the eye. The lady didn't throw away just one boxful of powder. She threw away at least two. That makes her a pro, doesn't it?"

Carol said, "What do you mean, she threw away two boxes of powder?"

"Remember you smelled the powder while we were watching the sunset? And saw some of it blowing over the rail? And sneezed because of it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that means she had already dumped one box of powder before the one we *saw* her dump. Because we didn't look down till afterward."

"Elementary," Leroy murmured. His expressive face lit up with the pleasure he always felt when engaging in this kind of deductive play with his partner. "But something else about the incident seemed of even more significance to me, if I may say so."

Danforth grinned. "Please say so."

"Cut it out, you two," Carol said plaintively. "You can't make a mystery out of this, not even in fun. I forbid it. We're on vacation. All I want to know is who the silly woman is who throws away Chanel Number Five powder."

"Please," Leroy said with an air of injured dignity, "doesn't anyone want to know what I deduced?"

"Of course, darling." Helen patted his hand. "Because I'm going to hear it anyway. But please make it short."

"Very well. I deduced that whoever was throwing away the powder wanted the empty box for another purpose. She didn't throw the whole package into the sea — just the powder."

"A sobering thought," Danforth acknowledged. "What could she want with two empty powder boxes?"

Helen laughed. "Maybe she wanted something to keep her old buttons and pins in. Or her false teeth at night."

"A distinct possibility," her husband said approvingly.

Abruptly, Carol said, "Pardon me a moment."

She went over and spoke to the bartender who smiled and handed her something from under the bar. She came back with what proved to be a deck plan of the *Valhalla*, showing all staterooms, portholes, showers, closets, bars, and other features of the ship.

"Now, then," Carol went on in a businesslike tone, "the porthole from which the powder-dumper was operating was the eighth from the stern." She carefully counted eight portholes from the rear of the ship's sundeck. "She lives in cabin S-34," Carol announced triumphantly.

"I'll run down to the Purser's Office and look at the list of cabins," Helen offered eagerly. "Then we'll know who she is."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Within five minutes Helen returned, obviously bursting with news. "It isn't a woman at all!" she said. "How do you like that?"

"You mean there's no woman listed in Stateroom S-34?"

"Not one. It's a single cabin occupied exclusively by . . ." She paused dramatically. "By our bachelor friend, Mr. John Rich."

Leroy slowly put his drink down and straightened in his chair. His eyes met Danforth's. "A visiting lady, then?" he asked. "One of those widows he calls his 'harem'? Could that be the one who was dumping bath powder from his porthole?"

Danforth shook his head, frowning. "Not likely. But John Rich is small-boned, slender, and he has small hands. That bare arm from the porthole could have been *his*."

Leroy rubbed his jaw. "Well, well, well," he said softly, almost to himself. "If that's true, we have *two* incidents in which Mr. John Rich acted quite out of character—dumping powder into the ocean from his stateroom porthole, and using familiarly the scientific name of a tropical flower he shouldn't even know exists."

"Lots of people have flowers for a hobby, possibly ex-chauffeurs . . ." Helen began, but both men ignored her. They were suddenly as hot on the scent of this little mystery as though it were one of their own fictional plots.

"Suppose," said Leroy, "it *was* John Rich dumping bath powder, where would he have got it?"

"Right here on the ship," Carol said. "The shop sells French perfume, soap, and powder at very low prices."

"Say he bought the powder on the ship, then. Why?"

"Not for gifts to take home," Danforth said, "because he threw the stuff away. Therefore, he must have wanted empty powder boxes."

"Exactly. Again, why?"

"To hold something else, as you brilliantly deduced."

"But why buy expensive Chanel and waste it, just to get empty boxes? Why not the cheapest possible brand?"

"Ah," said Danforth, smiling, "one can but guess as to that. My guess is that Rich wants somebody —perhaps the customs officials in New York at the end of this cruise—to *think* he's bringing home a few gift boxes of Chanel powder, when he's really bringing home something else."

"Now that," Leroy grinned, "is a truly brilliant hypothesis to which I subscribe whole-heartedly. Respectable Chanel powder containers would be smuggling camouflage of the highest order for whatever John Rich fills them with."

Helen said in a resigned tone, "The next question before the house, therefore, is this: What does John Rich intend to fill the powder boxes with?"

"I withdraw my suggestion about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buttons and pins," Helen volunteered.

"Thank you." Danforth swung one leg over the arm of his chair. "Since he was emptying the boxes at Papeete, one might reasonably assume that he meant to fill them with something he intended to get in Tahiti."

"Any ideas?" Leroy asked.

"Dancing girls," said Carol. "Think how the boys would go for Tahitian bunnies in our key clubs at home!"

"Be serious, child," Leroy rebuked her. "Great minds are at work here. And your frivolity impedes smooth cerebration. Well, King?"

Danforth shrugged. "Whatever it was, I'll wager the flower girl who picked him up at Les Tropiques had something to do with it."

Leroy started visibly. He said with a trace of excitement, "That's it, by Jove!"

"What's it?" Helen demanded.

"I'll bet John Rich was using a prearranged recognition signal when he went through that *plumeria acuminata* bit—to identify himself to the flower girl."

"Of course!" Danforth tapped his fingers nervously on the table. "And the flower girl gives him a prearranged response and the red jasmine lei as the other half of the signal. That's why they became old buddies immediately and were in Quinn's together. They had some kind of deal cooking."

"Sex appeal alone drew them together, if you want to know what I think," Carol said. "I could tell by the way Rich looked at her!"

"But not," Leroy said thoughtfully, "by the way she looked at him. She kept brushing off Rich's passes at the bar and watching Quinn's door as though she were expecting someone."

"Her principal, you mean?" said Danforth. "The boss smuggler, maybe? You think she was assigned to pick Rich out of our tourist group and take him to her leader at Quinn's?"

"Something like that makes sense." Leroy absent-mindedly reached over and finished his wife's gimlet.

"Now that you've had your cocktail, darling," his wife said with deceptive sweetness, "it's well past dinner time. Come on. Forget John Rich, please. There's roast reindeer tonight."

Danforth and Leroy docilely followed their wives to the dining room.

With the last bite of dessert, however—something their Norwegian table steward referred to as "peaches pie"—the two mystery writers returned to their speculations.

"Tahiti," Leroy ruminated aloud, "produces nothing much but breadfruit, mangoes, taro root, copra, girls, climate, and leisure, not necessarily in that order. And none of these would fit comfortably into a Chanel powder box."

"It occurred to me during the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reindeer steak," said Danforth, "that Tahiti may be merely a way station, a pickup point, for whatever it is that Rich is smuggling."

"It's isolated enough, all right. In the middle of the Pacific, halfway between Asia and everywhere else. Let's see. Asia. From Asia, one smuggles embroideries and jade originating in Red China, oriental workmen who will work elsewhere for peanuts—"

Danforth snapped his fingers. "Why not the obvious answer?"

Politely Leroy inquired, "And what is the obvious answer, Professor? As if we didn't know."

"Think of boxes full of white powder. Think of Red China. Think of—"

"Heroin?"

"What else?"

"From the beginning," Leroy murmured, "it seemed clearly indicated."

Carol lifted her eyes to the ceiling and said, "You poor, mystery-happy idiots!"

Danforth ignored her. "There's more than a chance, Mart," he said, "that John Rich is not a retired chauffeur, but a member of some dope-peddling organization in the United States. He takes this round-the-world cruise solely for the purpose of picking up a shipment of heroin in Tahiti, where—by equally devious means—it has arrived from Hong Kong or Red China. Rich is seemingly above suspicion—an innocent tourist on a cruise."

Leroy took it up. "Right. Rich identifies himself to his Tahitian colleagues as the courier sent from America to pick up the heroin, by an exchange of prearranged code phrases with the flower girl, of which *plumeria acuminata* is undoubtedly one. After he has identified himself, the heroin is passed to him—perhaps in Quinn's—where the confusion would cover up *any* monkey business. Rich then conceals the heroin in the Chanel powder boxes he has prepared in his cabin.

"At the end of the cruise he calmly carries the heroin through customs, having dutifully entered several gift boxes of Chanel Number Five powder on his customs declaration, all according to regulations. The heroin powder in genuine Chanel boxes would almost certainly go undetected, even by a careful inspection which, incidentally, returning cruise passengers are seldom subjected to. Is that it?"

"That's exactly it," Danforth said. "So let's go ask the Captain to have Rich's cabin searched for the heroin. If it's there, the Captain can tip the Narcotics and Customs Bureaus by radio-telephone and have them catch Rich red-handed as he comes ashore in New York."

Leroy turned to Carol and Helen. "Will you excuse us?" he asked. "We'll meet you in the foward lounge later." He and Danforth stood up.

Helen said, "Are you really going

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Captain Hansen with that crazy story?"

"Certainly," her husband answered. "As conscientious American citizens . . ."

"But it's completely fantastic!" Carol broke in. "From an empty powder box and the name of a tropical flower, you deduce an international dope ring operating on this ship! Now really!"

"We didn't *make* a mystery out of this thing," Leroy defended himself. "We've merely made logical deductions from observed facts, that's all."

Carol and Helen looked at each other and suddenly dissolved in laughter.

"What's so funny?" Leroy asked.

"You!" his wife managed to gasp through her laughter. "You and your 'observed facts'! That's what's funny!" She and Helen struggled to contain their mirth. "But you're perfectly right when you say that you and King didn't make a mystery out of this."

"*We* did," Helen crowed.

Slowly Danforth and Leroy resumed their seats. They watched their wives like wary baby-sitters observing unfamiliar and obstreperous charges.

"Don't be cross with us, darlings," Carol said, "but one of the facts on which you based your deductions was slightly wrong. And it's our fault."

"What fact?" Leroy King spoke sharply.

"The number of the cabin from which the arm dumped the powder out the porthole."

"It wasn't S-34?"

"No. It was S-36."

"You said it was the eighth porthole from the stern," Leroy reminded her.

"I know. But it really wasn't. I fibbed. It was the ninth."

Danforth said to Helen, "And *you* looked it up and told us it was occupied, that cabin, by John Rich!" He looked at her accusingly. "What for?"

"Just for laughs," Helen chortled. "To see what you master-plotters would make of it. And you haven't disappointed us one bit, have they, Carol?"

Danforth summoned a rueful grin. "These women we call our wives," he said to his partner, "call powerfully to mind a single old-fashioned word: perfidious."

Leroy nodded. "At the very least," he agreed. Then he asked his wife curiously, "Who *does* occupy cabin S-36 if John Rich doesn't?"

"Two of the widows in John Rich's 'harem' occupy it—the cabin is a double."

"And it was one of them who threw away the powder?"

"They had each," Carol explained, "bought a box of Chanel Number Five powder for use on this trip from the shop. But Mrs. Piggott, the older of the two, proved allergic to Chanel powder. It made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her sneeze dreadfully. So she threw the powder out the porthole."

"And her roommate?"

"She very obligingly threw hers out, too, since she couldn't use it without causing Mrs. Piggott distress. And she'd already opened her box."

"But why save the boxes?"

Carol laughed. "Mrs. Piggott is going to the masquerade ball tomorrow night as a typical cruise shopper, with bargain items she's bought on this trip draped all over her. She decided the two empty powder boxes would make a good addition to her masquerade costume. So she saved them to wear."

"Well, well," Leroy murmured. His lean face, surprisingly, reflected pride and affection rather than anger as he contemplated his wife's duplicity. "When did you find all this out?" he asked curiously.

"In the ladies' washroom at Les Tropiques after dinner that night," Helen said. "You know how girls talk in places like that! And there was some powder there that made Mrs. Piggott sneeze, which got her started on the subject."

"And I suppose," said Danforth with an injured air, "you also knew all about Rich's use of *plumeria acuminata* to the flower girl on the porch?"

Helen said, "Mrs. Piggott used to be a botany teacher, didn't you know? As a member of John Rich's 'harem,' I'm sure she had talked to him on some of the local Tahitian blooms. And I guess John Rich just used the *plumeria* name to show off to the half-naked flower girl—you know, impress her with the fact that he knew something about Tahiti."

Carol said, "I *told* you it was sex appeal alone that drew them together."

"Very likely." Leroy called the wine steward and ordered a B & B for each of them. When it came, he looked over his tiny glass at his partner and remarked with a grin, "Well, King, even if we were wrong about it, I wouldn't say we completely wasted our time on this powder box mystery, would you?"

"By no means," Danforth replied sardonically. "Far from it. Just think, I shall never again be ignorant of the proper name for a pointed white frangipani flower! This is not to be lightly regarded."

"I didn't mean that," Leroy said. "I meant that we've been forcibly brought face to face in this business with the greatest enigma of them all —with the only mystery that even Leroy King may never be able to solve."

Helen and Carol dropped their eyes modestly. Carol kicked Helen under the table. "I think they mean *us*," she said wickedly. "Aren't they cute?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Do you remember "The Man Who Was a Station Wagon," in our December 1963 issue? An unusual and charming story. Fred Rodewald was co-author of that unusual story, and it is obvious now that Mr. Rodewald is a man of unusual turn of mind. For here he gives us the strange tale of a curious duel of wits between two men—an unusual relationship that has a curiously memorable quality . . .

THE LONG AND DEADLY GAME

by FRED RODEWALD

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO CHEAT at chess? I once devoted five years of study to cheating at chess and I concluded that it is almost impossible—unless, of course, you are playing against yourself. I am a card man myself. By nature I have no innate integrity, and what integrity I have is the result of years of other people's watching every move I make. So you might say that I have only a kind of accidental integrity, but I do have that.

I gave up cards a few weeks after my wife passed away—a term I now use guiltily; but I used to use it in quotes, sometimes with a tone of deep loneliness when speaking to young females, sometimes with a tone of irony when talking to unreliably married men I did business with. But I gave up cards because of my departed wife's grandfather, John Hawes. Old John is really a chess man—a man who has integrity and is a partner in my law firm; but when I gave up cards, it was his law firm.

It was about a week—I can be more precise than that—it was exactly eight days after Louise passed away, and I was spending a mutually consolatory evening with Old John Hawes. The day was December 4th, 1948. It was cold in the game room in spite of the three logs blazing in the huge fireplace.

Old John and I were playing gin rummy in the dimly lit room. I squinted at my cards, which was actually a useless gesture since I knew exactly what I had dealt myself; but then one can never be too sure. Old John, sitting across from me, was hidden behind a film of aromatic tobacco smoke that hung over the table. He puffed on his pipe and put down his first discard. I ignored it, picked the king of clubs from the top of the deck, and knocked with two in my hand.

"Hmm," he murmured. "You've caught me again."

I marked the score on the pad, and put my bereaved look back on my face; it had been lost sometime

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

during the card game. "It's just that your mind is on other things, John," I said. Looking back at myself as I was then, I suppose I "whined" instead of "said."

"Mmm, yes," he said, and leaned back in his chair.

I shuffled the cards and placed them in front of the old man for his cut. He ignored the cards. I tried to see him through the film of smoke.

"Care to cut, John?"

He didn't answer and I assumed he really did have his mind on other things. In a few moments I asked again, but there was still no answer. He just sat behind the smoke, leaning deep into his chair and puffing on his pipe.

When a few minutes had passed, I sensed his eyes boring through the smoke and piercing into my mind. Then he moved slowly to the front of his chair, put his elbows on the table and brought his face up between his upraised hands; and as his face came through the smoke, I was almost shocked.

There was a gray straight smile on his thin lips, and there was nothing but pure malevolence in his slate-colored eyes.

"Uh, I guess you don't care to play any more, John?" I asked.

"No," he said, and continued to stare at me. I could think of nothing to say; it was a little embarrassing and somehow frightening.

"No, Leonard, I don't care to play any more," he said in what I felt to be a mincing tone of voice and what he no doubt felt to be an imitation of my voice. Understand, I'm giving my reactions as they were then. My voice isn't particularly strong, but at the time I certainly didn't consider it either mincing or simpering. I did think his imitation a poor one, but I refrained from telling him so. He's a very forceful man, John Hawes.

"Let us try to understand each other," he continued, "in the event that we haven't in the past."

"I think I understand how you feel about me, John," I said, "and I don't think anything can be gained by our going into it now."

"You are quite wrong," he said, and his expression remained unchanged; his eyes continued to push at me, to rumple my tweed suit, to prickle the flesh about my neck.

"Now, John, I know we've had our differences—never explicit ones, perhaps, but still nothing that time won't overcome."

"If they weren't explicit, Leonard, it was because you lacked even the most primitive rudiments of sensitivity. They were explicit enough for dogs and even most snakes."

He hissed the last word at me, no doubt trying to intimidate me. His nostrils flared, his pupils contracted, as I've seen those of parrots do. He was tensed for what seemed ten minutes. At last he relaxed somewhat and the gray smile returned.

"Now," he repeated, with an air

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of finality, "let us try to understand each other. First of all, I am completely aware that my granddaughter did not fall accidentally from that cliff. Nor did she jump of her own will. In short, Leonard, I know that you murdered her."

"I beg . . ."

"Oh, stop it, Leonard, and quit being a fool. I know you murdered Louise, and although I can't prove you did it, I think I can get you for it. As a matter of fact, I will devote the rest of my life—my few remaining years—to getting you."

He paused for a moment, puffed on his pipe, and then returned to his train of thought. "I am an honest man, and I am warning you, Leonard. You can't get away from me without forfeiting the fortune Louise left to you, since I control her estate and will continue to control it for as long as I live. In the meantime you have a career of sorts ahead of you. I solemnly promised Louise that I would take you into my firm and I am a man of my word. Her death by your hand does not nullify my word. On the other hand, if you try to set yourself up outside my firm, I will ruin you wherever you go. Now, do you choose to stay?"

"John," I said, "you are unjustified in—"

"Do you choose to stay, Leonard?"

"Yes, but—"

"I knew you would, Leonard, because I think I know you. And that, incidentally, is something very definitely to your disadvantage. If I were you, I would try to change the very make-up of your soul, but with a soul like yours, Leonard, it may be impossible. You are fundamentally dishonest, and I doubt that you can ever be anything else.

"And as to your dishonesty, Leonard—when you visit me on the evening of the fourth of every month, we will entertain ourselves from now on by playing chess, not cards. I don't enjoy playing cards with people who cheat, especially when they lack finesse. Yours was a very crude performance this evening, Leonard."

He stopped talking and relit his pipe. I didn't know what to say or do. I knew that I had begun a new and deadly game that would end only when one of us made a mistake or died—or both, for they could very well be the same thing.

"Yes, Leonard, I know what you are thinking," he said. "And that, of course, is part of the agreement. But you won't catch me walking in front of high cliffs or open elevator shafts."

It usually takes a little time for genuine hatred to come into being, but when a man like John Hawes starts on you, hatred is born spontaneously and flames up quickly. It was a new experience for me—but then I had never before encountered an honest man.

As I understood my choice at the time—my immediate choice, that is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—I could either admit defeat by refusing to play his game, thus forfeiting my inheritance, or I could agree to play his game and hope to win by his rules, or I could win at my own game now—with one sudden act of violence. He was old and weak. But there were servants in the house and my presence was well known to them.

I quickly reviewed the circumstances. He had been absolutely correct in his evaluation of me and of the incidents surrounding me. I *had* murdered his granddaughter; I *was* fundamentally dishonest; and he had nothing on me—in this I assumed he was his usual honest self. His challenge I found fascinating, but I knew that the fascination could wear thin and leave in its place either frustration or terror.

There were some things in my favor, of course. He was an old man, almost seventy, and since I was only thirty, both the years and the odds were on my side. And for once in my life I could play the other man's game—but it must be understood that this was no act of bravery on my part; I was merely certain of the odds.

We simply made a contract to play his game—that of integrity—at which I couldn't lose if I played carefully; and when I found the opportunity to play *my* game, he most certainly would lose. I would work in his law firm and simply be honest—until I had the chance to win by safely killing him.

This was what he was offering, and he was betting not only that I would be unable to maintain integrity but that I would bungle my own game—when I tried to play by my rules.

I looked at the old man who had been watching me carefully and I saw a furrow in his brow; but it smoothed itself almost immediately.

"As long as I play it your way, I'm safe," I summarized my thoughts, "and when I play it my way, I'll surely win."

"You almost understand it," he replied. He stood up from his chair. "Remember, Leonard, we spend the evenings of the fourth of every month here, and we play chess."

I got up and walked toward the hall leading to the front door. "Good night, Leonard," he called after me. "I'll see you at the office tomorrow."

For the first five years it was a fascinating game. I worked overtime at it. In a law firm the size of ours, situations arise every month that present distinct possibilities. Lawyers see desperate people, and desperate people are always definite possibilities for the kind of project I had in mind. But I couldn't seem to find quite the precise situation I was looking for. And there was always Old John peering over my shoulder and probably second-guessing me every time I formulated a project.

In the beginning I was a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uncertain of myself, not quite knowing how I was going to succeed in switching the rules; later I was a little put out at my inability to find the right opportunity; and finally the situation became almost amusing. I should have realized my danger when I caught myself laughing out loud at a mental exercise I had thought through that left me stymied once again. These mental exercises always worked out just like the chess games we played: Old John had me checkmated.

The integrity part of the game got to be a habit; it was, after all, merely self-preservation. I was soon able to look into a man's eyes and tell if he wanted to pull some sort of legal shenanigan. We coldly refused such cases. I don't know how long it took me to realize that my inability to play my game was entirely owing to the fact that I was playing John's game, and as I say, it became habitual with me.

I learned a lot about law in those five years and I became an able attorney; but I learned little else because until I became amused at myself and the game I was playing, I thought seriously of nothing but the "game."

It was ten years after Old John had "challenged" me that I finally resigned myself to a "waiting game" —that is, I consciously admitted to myself that the best course to pursue was patience—to let time work for me. I had merely to wait out the old man—he couldn't win so long as I played his way, and I was playing flawlessly. He was getting older, of course, and his health was failing. He rarely came to the office now and I had actually taken control of the firm.

We still had our monthly chess game; the only difference now was that I was beginning to win occasionally, which should have pleased me I suppose, but it didn't. He was such an old man and I guess I had grown accustomed to losing.

Then too it seemed as though he wasn't really trying any more. At this stage, I only rarely thought of our game in the terms of our original contract; but when I did, I was more than ever convinced that while I played his way there was a stalemate. At awkward moments I caught myself realizing that I could now play my own game whenever I chose, but the idea of not playing his way had become repugnant to me.

After this, I quit considering John Hawes as my opponent, my enemy. He was simply a dying old man. About this time I also realized that it is impossible to be a lawyer, a good practicing lawyer, for fifteen years without gaining at least a measure of compassion. Somewhere along the line I had acquired it—maybe from a widow, maybe from an orphan or even from a murderer; but I had acquired it. I began to take cases for the sake of humanity and I defended them with all my power and strength; and I felt a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deep sense of outrage when the law and the courts worked against the good and the just.

And then the day arrived when I looked into my mirror and saw a decent human being—one with faults and shortcomings, of course, but one who stood for the right things. It seemed to me that the weakness I used to confess in my honest moments with myself was gone . . .

It was late in the evening on the fourth of the month. In the cold December air outside my apartment I caught a taxi. I knew that Old John was dying and I sickened when I thought of the abyss that his death would open up for me. He still had little regard for me, but he was the one person in the world who knew what I had become and from what I had emerged. In the taxi I thought of myself as I had been, and I remembered the old man's saying years ago, "Don't be a fool, Leonard." And I remembered the disgust I had heard in his voice.

Old John had been right. I had been a fool and an object of disgust. Even more terrible—I was a murderer.

I paid the driver and went up the steps. I rang the doorbell. Waiting for Richard the butler to open the door, I turned and looked out on this quiet neighborhood and at the lights shining in the darkness, and the cold of the night air felt good and the bright hard light of the stars warmed me inside.

Richard opened the door and I walked inside. He took my hat and coat, saying, "He's not at all well, sir."

I climbed the stairs and knocked lightly on John's door and then opened it immediately so that he wouldn't have to bother with an answer. I walked to his bed and sat down in a nearby chair. He was terribly thin now and his eyes were almost half of his face. I looked at him a long time, not knowing if he recognized me.

"The game is almost up, Leonard," he said, and there was a faint smile on his face; but it was different from the tight gray one, the only smile I had ever seen before tonight.

"That's what I came to see you about, John." I took a sealed envelope from my pocket. I mentally weighed it, then put it under his hand which was lying on top of the coverlet.

"That's my confession, John," I said. "My confession of murder."

"I know." His eyes were on the envelope, and his entire body looked even more tired than it had when I came in the door.

"What are you going to do with it?" I asked.

"I have won, haven't I?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I don't have to do anything, do I?"

We sat looking at each other for a long time. At last he spoke again. "What was it you once said?—that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you can't lose playing my game. Wasn't that it?"

I nodded. "And you said that I almost understand—but of course I didn't. I didn't really understand until tonight."

He slid his withered hand toward me. I clasped it in mine.

I stood up and walked to the door. I turned to look at him for the last time.

"Goodbye, John."

"I'm almost sorry I've won, Leonard."

"I'm not . . . you can tear up the confession, John—I know what I have to do . . . goodbye, John."

"Goodbye, Leonard."

NEXT MONTH . . .

We plan to bring you

a suspense *short novel* — complete!

NEIL PATERSON'S contemporary classic

Man on the Tightrope

***new* detective and crime short stories by**

HUGH PENTECOST

HELEN McCLOY

GERALD KERSH

JULIAN SYMONS

and a surprise "discovery" by

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

The November 1964 issue will be on sale October 1, 1964

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As the author wrote to us: "There's really no hidden meaning or symbolism in this story—unless the reader chooses to find it there."

THE CRIME OF AVERY MANN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

He came out of the main gate with nothing but the clothes on his back and the few dollars they'd given him. It was small recompense for all those years—small, indeed—and when he was a safe distance away, he looked back at the grim prison walls as if expecting the aura of decay to be visible in the morning sky.

But there was no turning back now. He was a free man—free to make his own prison in the world after all these years.

"Pardon me," a voice said, startling him with its nearness. "You're Avery Mann, aren't you?"

He turned his head and saw a youngish man with a tanned, healthy face. "Yes. Yes, I am."

"I'm from AP, sir. We'd like a statement from you. How does it feel to be free after so many years?"

Avery Mann smiled, adding to the wrinkles that already creased his face. "I have nothing to say."

"But how do you feel? Will you be able to adjust to the world after being in prison so long?"

Avery Mann tried to edge politely past. He didn't want to speak with this healthy young man who had never known the inside of prison walls. "Sorry. No comment."

"Just one question, then. Do you regret it?"

"Regret what?"

"Do you regret doing it?"

"I'm too old to regret anything I've done. Too old for second thoughts. I've served my time."

"Do you intend to live here, in the city?"

He hadn't really thought about that. Where *did* he intend to live out the few years life still had in store for him? "I haven't decided. I must go now. There's so much time to make up."

The reporter stepped aside. "You're right there, sir. A lifetime, almost."

Avery Mann walked on, and after a time, when he thought he noticed the reporter still following him at a distance, he spent a dollar of his meager funds to take a taxi downtown. The city had changed greatly in the years since he'd last seen it, and even the occasional newspaper photos he'd seen of giant redevelopment projects had not fully prepared him for the towering wonders which had sprouted up on all sides. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no longer, somehow, a place for an old man: it had too much of the gleam and newness of youth.

He left the cab in an older section of the city, near a block of shabby boarding houses which the driver had recommended in response to his question. It was an area of old people —mostly retired pensioners living in bitter loneliness and waiting only for death to overtake them. Here Avery Mann could find perhaps a friendship of the sort he'd known behind bars most of his life. It would be a friendship based more on the exigencies of the situation rather than on any mutual admiration; but he was used to that.

The first doorway he tried yielded an ancient woman wrapped in a faded blue shawl. "Yes?" she asked unpleasantly. "Are you looking for someone?"

"A room. I was wondering if you have a vacant room."

"You'll have to see Mrs. Peters about that. I only board here."

"Where can I find her?"

"Around the back, I suppose, working in the garden. She's always working in the garden, this kind of weather."

Mrs. Peters was indeed bent over some flowery task, and so intent on it that she didn't hear his approach. She gave a little start of alarm when he announced himself by saying, "Mrs. Peters? I've come about a room."

"Oh! Yes, we have rooms." She straightened up and gazed at him critically through harlequin sunglasses that seemed much too youthful on her middle-aged face.

"Fine. I can't afford very much . . ."

"Oh, our rates are quite reasonable. I'll show you what I have." She paused then, in the act of turning, and studied him once more. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"I doubt that. I've only just arrived in town."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say, but it's Avery Mann."

"Yes. I remember now. Your picture was in that magazine section just last week. It said they were letting you out of jail."

"Yes."

"Well . . . you know, I can't have you staying here."

"Why not?"

She took off her glasses and squinted at him. "Mr. Mann, what would my other boarders say? What would they do? They'd move out, that's what! After all, *every*one knows about you."

"Yes," he said. "I suppose they do."

"You poor man, I feel sorry for you, but there's really nothing I can do. It would have been a kindness for them to keep you there, behind bars. Letting you out after all these years is just plain cruel, I say."

"Thank you," he said, moving away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He went on down the shabby street, skipping the next two houses because of their proximity to Mrs. Peters', and then turned in at a smaller, freshly painted place nestled comfortably behind a white picket fence. This time he gave his name as John Smith, and the woman in charge seemed to accept it. She showed him to the front room, a tiny but acceptable place with a view of the street, and told him the rent would be $10 a week.

"You don't mind that my last tenant died here, do you?" she asked.

Avery Mann said he didn't mind.

Settled in his room at last, he felt the sudden need of something cool to drink, of perhaps the companionship of a bar. He carefully counted out the remainder of his money and decided he could afford a couple of beers. Maybe that would make him feel better.

He chose a corner bar two blocks down the street, an apparent meeting place for the elderly of the neighborhood and the youthful toughs of the adjoining district. They made an odd combination, seated along the bar in random order, carefully ignoring the others' existence.

Avery Mann settled on a stool at the far end and ordered a beer.

"You new around here?" the bartender asked casually, wiping the polished wood dry with his rag before dampening it again with the overflowing glass.

"Yes. I just moved in today."

"Nice neighborhood. Little run down, but at least they've been keeping the undesirable element out. That's important for you old fellows, right?"

Avery Mann nodded, glancing down the length of the bar at the lounging delinquents and wondering just whom the bartender considered undesirable. "Could I have another beer?"

"Say, you musta been thirsty!"

"I still am."

The bartender returned after a moment with another glass and repeated his ritual with the damp rag. "You know, you look an awful lot like that guy they just let out of prison."

"Who would that be?" He felt his pulse leap a little.

"Mann. Something Mann. You know the one."

"Yes."

"Awful thing he did, all those years ago. Wonder they ever let him out."

He cleared his throat. "I'm Avery Mann," he said quietly.

"You? Oh, sure. Like I said, I thought you looked . . . Say, this is just like having a celebrity in the place!"

"Is it?"

The bartender lowered his voice. "Sure! I wouldn't want them all to know it, though. You know what I mean?"

"I know."

"Tell me something, whatever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made you do it? Just between you and I."

Avery Mann finished his beer. He carefully laid two coins in front of him and slid off the stool. "I have to be going now."

"Say, I'm sorry if I . . ."

Outside, the day was clouding up, darkening with the coming of night or rain or both. He started walking quickly down the street, but almost at once had to slacken his pace. A near lifetime of tiny cells and exercise yards had left him unprepared for a fast gait. Or perhaps it was just old age . . .

Halfway along the second block, he became aware of someone following him. It was an instinct born of long years with such shadows. He slowed down and took out a cigarette, and while lighting it managed to observe the long-haired youth matching his pace. He knew at once he would be no match for a mugger, and yet running might bring him nothing but a heart attack.

Surprisingly, he reached the safety of his new home without incident, although the youth was still following at a narrowing distance. He went inside and locked the thin door of his room behind him. But almost immediately there came a soft knocking on the wood.

"Who's there?" he croaked.

"Just someone to see you," a voice said, and he knew it belonged to the youth.

"What do you want?"

"To talk with you. I'm a friend."

Well, no harm could come to him here, in his own room.

"All right," he decided. "Just a minute."

The youth who waited outside was a sideburned boy of perhaps eighteen, and now that he had a closer look at him, Avery Mann was certain he'd been seated on the next stool in the bar.

"I had to see you," the boy said as he came in.

"What about?"

"You're Avery Mann. I heard you talkin' to the bartender."

He sighed and stepped away from the youth. "Yes, I'm Avery Mann." Would there never be any peace?

"I've read everything about you —all the books and the magazines and everything! You're the greatest!"

"Oh. Not really."

"You've got to tell me all about it, about just how you did it. I'm goin' to be like you some day. And soon too! They'll remember Chuck Barnes just like they remember Avery Mann."

"I spent a long time in jail for what I did."

"That's why you've got to tell me everything. So I don't make the same mistakes!" He spoke with a sincerity that sent a chill down Avery Mann's spine. "Tell me how you did it!"

He turned from the youth and stared out the window for a long time. A few drops of rain were beginning to fall, big splashy spring-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time drops, and the occasional strollers were scattering for cover. At that moment he really wished they had never let him free. He'd come out into this—reporters and landladies and bartenders and now this two-bit hoodlum dreaming of a twisted sort of fame.

"I've forgotten the details," he said finally. "It was so long ago. I don't even like to think of it any more."

"But—"

"I can't help you, boy! I never could help you." He wondered for a wild instant if the youth might kill him, strike him down in a frenzy to achieve the sudden fame he sought.

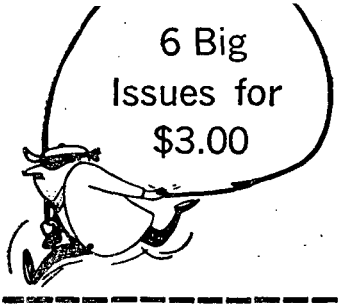
But the boy only ran a tired hand through his greasy hair and started for the door. "I knew you wouldn't," he said bitterly. "I knew you wouldn't tell me about it."

Then he turned, for one final tribute. "But you were the greatest, Avery Mann. You were really the greatest."

He watched the boy until he disappeared from view down the street. Then he turned away from the window, because it was raining harder now and rain depressed him. He fumbled with his pack of cigarettes, noticed that his hand was shaking too much to light one, and gave up in disgust.

He was still Avery Mann, still the "greatest." But he was an old man—older than any of them realized. He sat on the edge of the bed for the rest of the night, simply staring into space, staring unseeingly at the faded flowered wallpaper.

Staring, as he had so many nights before, trying and failing to remember what his crime had been.



Loaded With Mystery Thrills

Bigger than ever before—better than ever before: EQMM is the best buy ever!

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
505 Park Avenue / New York, N.Y. 10022

Please enter my special subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE—6 big issues for $3.00.

☐ $3 enclosed ☐ Bill me later

Name _____
(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW police procedural story by***

LAWRENCE TREAT

It was a big case—one of the biggest they'd ever had. All regular work schedules would be suspended, and the Homicide Squad would be at it day and night until they dropped—or until they cracked the case of a maniac at large in the city, a maniac who slashed the faces of women with a hook in place of one of his hands . . . But sooner or later the break would come: some insignificant detail would link up with some other insignificant detail. It had to be that way. . .

D AS IN DETAIL

by LAWRENCE TREAT

WHEN DETECTIVE INSPECTOR Mitch Taylor knocked off for the day, he left Amy's trowel in the Number 4 patrol car. The car was the one he always drove, so he didn't bother anybody about the trowel. He simply left it there under the front seat.

Amy had wanted to buy some marigolds—the dwarf ones she said were just right for the window box in their apartment; but he told her to forget about them—why throw good money away on something he could maybe get for free? Just tell him what they looked like and he'd scrounge them up somewhere. She said, all right, but get some extra ones for the Jub Freemans.

But Mitch's mind didn't exactly run to flowers, and he forgot all about them except when his foot happened to come off the brake and hit against the trowel. Or when he was home, like now. Relaxed. With the kids in bed and Amy sitting at the desk and going over the month's bills.

He watched her, a slim girl with delicate features and bright, teasing eyes, and she could add and subtract as easy as she could rattle off the alphabet. He was thinking what kind of a heel was he, anyhow? He ought to get her those dwarf marigolds even if he had to plant the seeds on his head and make like a flower pot.

The idea sort of bothered him—as if the thing might really happen if he weren't careful; and then the phone rang and Amy picked it up and answered.

She turned to Mitch and said, "It's for you. Official."

"The hell it is," he said, getting up. "What can they want at eleven o'clock?" But he crossed the room briskly and took the phone. "Tay-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lor," he said in his high-pitched tenor.

Sergeant Morty Topps, at headquarters, spoke up. "Central Bureau," he said. "Signal two-nine. They'll pick you up downstairs. They know where to go."

"Right," Mitch said.

Morty grunted and then added in a low voice, as if he were telling a big secret, "Mitch, they think it's him again."

"Huh?" Mitch said. He held onto the phone even after he heard the click at the other end, and then he put the receiver down carefully, as if he were suddenly very tired. "It's him again," he said to Amy. "Only this time, it's a murder."

Amy seemed to wilt, and her voice was almost a wail. "Oh, Mitchell!" she said.

He put his hand on her shoulder for a moment, and he could practically feel the tenderness in her, and maybe in him, too. Then he wheeled, walked over to the closet, and took his gun and holster down from the top shelf where he kept them out of reach of the kids. He strapped on the holster, slipped his jacket over it, and headed for the door.

"Dunno when I'll be back," he said, and he went out.

The patrol car was waiting downstairs, and Mitch slid in. Flaherty was driving but Mitch didn't know the other guy. It was crowded with all three of them in the front seat.

"Where we going?" Mitch asked.

"Irving and Holmes," Flaherty said. "Know anything about it?"

"They said it was him again," Mitch answered.

"Geez!" The two uniformed cops said it at practically the same time. After that none of them felt much like talking.

The first time it happened, it looked like a routine case and the local precinct had handled it. Their report said that around ten o'clock at night a woman had stopped for a traffic light, and a guy with a gun had come over and tried to rob her. She'd screamed and the guy slashed her, and they brought her to the hospital. She was in no condition to be questioned, and the precinct hadn't done much except notify the Homicide Squad. They handled all crimes against the person, so next morning Lieutenant Decker sent Mitch and Balenky over to the hospital to make the investigation.

They found this dame with her face wrapped up in bandages. She'd been carved up and was still in shock, so they only had a few minutes with her. But what they found out was that a kind of giant with a beard two feet long had come over and called her a name. He had a gun in one hand, but his other arm didn't have a hand at all. It had a hook, and he slashed her face with it. Three deep cuts, almost evenly spaced. No attempt to rob—the first precinct report had that part of it all wrong. And no motive. Just the slashing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was all. Nothing to go on. Nobody she knew. No leads, no nothing.

Mitch and Balenky had come back the same afternoon and had questioned her some more, but there was nothing much to add. They got a description from her and put it on the teletype, and everybody in the department went looking for this beatnik with a beard. Or maybe he'd shaved it off, so every one-armed man in town got pulled in, but none of them had a hook and none of them could have been at the spot where the assault took place.

A week later it happened again. Same pattern. A good-looking blonde this time. She stopped for a red light, and this loony came over with his gun and his hook, and he called her a harlot and slashed her face. Same three deep cuts. Again, no reason, no nothing.

Decker talked to her this time, with Mitch present. She had soft blue eyes that were filled with tears, and her voice sounded hurt. Mitch was shook up just hearing it, and he kept wondering what she'd look like when the bandages were finally taken off.

After that the newspapers really piled it on. A maniac was loose, and no woman in the city was safe. They called the guy Captain Hook and wanted to know what was wrong with the police department. The Commissioner advised all women driving alone to watch out when they stopped for red lights. As a result, the traffic detail was going crazy with all the minor accidents. Women went through red lights and they all had the same excuse—they'd seen somebody who might have been this loony. The police didn't give out any tickets—any judge who fined a female for going through a red light would have been howled off the bench.

There were so many tips coming through the police switchboard that they had to set up a special number for the Captain Hook calls. Some of the tips were so phony they could be thrown out without even investigating, but the rest of them had to be checked out. Every damn one of them. But there on the Homicide Squad, it was like slugging against thin air.

With the whole city going hysterical, there was no time to work on anything else. Larceny statistics went up and the crooks had a field day because they knew the police didn't have time to bother with small stuff. The capture of Captain Hook was all that mattered.

The papers proposed a fund to take care of plastic surgery for the two victims. Psychiatrists wrote special articles and went haywire, dreaming up what they thought the guy was like. They said it was all his mother's fault—she'd done something to him when he was a kid and now he was taking it out on the world, or the female part of it, anyhow. Captain Hook, they said, was probably a pillar of the church and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

respected member of the community, active in stuff like campaigns for censorship and stiffer penal laws.

Mitch read all the theories, but he didn't learn much. He was right in the middle of it, too, on account he'd made the first investigation. The reports swarmed all over him, but he clammed up the way Lieutenant Decker had ordered him to, and let the Lieutenant handle the questions. Which was no picnic for him, either.

Privately, Mitch didn't have much confidence in the descriptions the two victims had given him. You wear a beard and that's all anybody notices, particularly when they're scared to death. And when you take a cut at them through a car window, you look big even if you're not standing on your toes, which you probably are. So for Mitch's money, those descriptions were like an eight-year-old telling about the big bad man he saw somewhere in the dark.

Anyway, the police were running around in circles and they knew it, and the chances were they'd keep running around for a while, only faster. So Mitch sat there next to the two cops in the squad car and kept his trap shut. And so did they. What was the sense of talking, until they got there and found out what had happened?

It was at the intersection of Irving and Holmes, just as Flaherty had said, and the precincts cops had already roped off the area. Lieutenant Decker and Balenky were there, and so was Jub Freeman, the lab expert. They were grouped around a cream-colored sedan that had banged into the first tree down on Irving.

Mitch walked over, and in the police spotlight he saw this dame slumped over the wheel. She'd been shot in the head and there were three jagged wounds on her face, and she looked dead all right. The door of the car was open on her side, and on the floor Mitch could see a small three-pronged cultivator with blood on it—one of those little hand-things for scratching up the soil. Amy used to have one of them for her window box.

Mitch pointed to the cultivator. "So that's Captain Hook, huh?" he said.

Decker, grim and edgy and impatient because he had to hold up everything until the Medical Examiner arrived, answered sharply. "Him, or his kid brother."

Mitch knew what the Lieutenant meant. You get a crime like this, something unusual and different, and every peanut with his brains knocked loose comes along and does the same thing, and it breaks out all over the place, like a rash.

Mitch turned to Jub Freeman. "What happened?"

But it was Decker who answered. "She was shot and marked up when she stopped over there, at the other side of the crossing. Car's got an automatic drive, so it kept crawling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

until it hit this tree. The guy's arm might have struck the door and had the claw jarred out of his hand after he slashed her. Anyhow, a panel truck was coming down Holmes, so our boy ran."

"He was seen?" Mitch asked hopefully.

"Sure," Decker said. "He's always seen. He has a beard, and he has a claw instead of a hand. Brother! Didn't they tell you?"

Mitch inched away and looked at Jub again, who motioned to him. Out of Decker's hearing Jub spoke in a low voice.

"The truck almost hit her car when the driver slammed down his brakes and swung out. Says he saw the guy run behind that row of houses. They're searching the back yards now, but you know what the chances are."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "But we got that claw thing, and maybe a slug."

Jub nodded. "We'll see," he said. His round face with the puffed-out cheeks gave him a perpetually cheerful look. If he was tense underneath, he didn't show it.

"What I can't figure," Mitch said, "is why a dame would let this guy walk up to the car. Everybody knows about him—that's all they talk about. Why didn't she see him coming at her?"

"Maybe she was thinking about something else," Jub said. "Maybe she was in love."

"Yeah," Mitch said drily. "Love, huh?" Then he heard the sound of a distant siren. That would be the Commissioner or the M.E. In a little while they could get started.

It took about twenty minutes before the M.E. released the body. Lieutenant Decker went over her stuff and found her driver's license. Grace Inskip, 2432 Stowe. She was wearing a wedding ring and she'd been killed only a couple of blocks from home.

The Lieutenant spoke crisply—. "Taylor, you go over there and break the news. And find out whatever you can—who she was, where she was going. And get her husband to identify, if he's there."

"Right," Mitch said. He hated this kind of a job, but he couldn't worm out of it. And with the Commissioner there and the Lieutenant acting like a drill sergeant, Mitch was glad to scram.

He was moving away when Jub approached. "Mitch," he said, "get me a soil sample from her place, will you?" Jub took an envelope from his pocket and scribbled the name Inskip on it. "Just a handful, that's all I need."

"Sure," Mitch said. "You think—"

"Too soon to think," Jub said energetically. "I just want stuff to play around with."

It looked as if Jub were reaching, but he was thorough and he'd pulled plenty of miracles in the past. So if he wanted some dirt, Mitch would get it for him.

He scraped up a handful from a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well-cultivated flowerbed in front of the house and put it in Jub's envelope. Then Mitch went up the porch steps and rang the bell. There was a light inside, and a gentle, flabby little man wearing a corduroy jacket opened the door. The husband, Mitch supposed.

"Mrs. Grace Inskip lives here?" Mitch asked.

The little man nodded. "Yes, she's my wife. Why? Who are you?"

"Inspector Taylor," Mitch said. "She's had a kind of accident, and —" He stumbled around in his mind for an easy way to break it, gave up, and came straight out with it. "Well, she was killed."

The little guy went white. "Oh, my!" he said. "Oh, my!" He backed off and plunked down on a chair and said, "Oh, my!" a couple more times. Then he asked how it happened and Mitch told him.

"It sounds like that Captain Hook," Inskip gasped.

"Yeah," Mitch said, "but right now I'd like to know where she was going, for instance."

Inskip looked even sicker. "I don't know," he said. "That's what's so awful about it. I don't know! She—"

He gagged and couldn't say it, but Mitch kept prodding him. "You don't know where she went? Or with whom? She told you something, didn't she? Let's have it, Mr. Inskip."

The little man finally choked out an answer. "With one of her boy friends. She had several, but I really didn't mind. I understood her because I—well, I loved her and I'm—I'm—" He couldn't find what he had started to say, so he began again. "I was waiting for her to come home . . ." And then he repeated, "Oh, my!"

"Yeah," Mitch said, feeling sorry for the little guy and wondering where this line of talk was going to lead. "Yeah," he said. "Who were they? The boy friends, I mean."

"I don't know—I didn't want to know. And they really didn't mean anything to her—not one of them. Except—"

"Except who?" Mitch said, and he bore down.

"The one with a sweet tooth. I could tell when she was going to see him because she usually made candy the day before, and took it with her. But she was afraid of him and terribly worried."

"Why?" Mitch asked, getting more interested.

"All I know is what I overheard her saying on the phone one afternoon. The window was open and I was working in the garden, and I guess she didn't know I was there. Whoever it was, she kept telling him he wasn't really bad, he couldn't help himself, and he ought to go see a doctor or else he was liable to do it again."

"Do what?"

"I don't know. But he must have said something to make her real sore, because suddenly her voice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sounded angry and she said their relationship was pure and honest and she didn't want him to talk like that."

"When was this conversation?" Mitch asked.

Inskip rocked forward. "Let me think. I came home early that day. It was the day I brought those flowers she liked so much. Dwarf marigolds. I can tell by the bill—it's here somewhere."

"Let's see it," Mitch said.

Inskip got up and rummaged in the pigeonholes of a desk and came up with the bill. "The fourteenth," he said.

"Yeah," Mitch said. That would make it halfway between Captain Hook's two previous assaults. "What else do you know about this guy? The one with the sweet tooth." Mitch asked.

"Nothing. And what difference does it make? She's dead now, and it's all over."

"Sure, but we got to find out how it happened," Mitch said.

Inskip nodded and Mitch questioned him some more. But there wasn't anything else Inskip could tell him, so Mitch took the guy upstairs and got hold of Mrs. Inskip's address book and her phone memos. Then he bundled the little guy into a squad car and sent him down to the morgue, to identify.

It was after one a.m. when Mitch got back to headquarters. Morty Topps was at the big desk that you saw when you came through the double doors before going down the corridor where the offices and Squad Rooms and all the rest of the bureaus and departments and special details were located. He told Mitch that the Lieutenant was up in the lab with Jub, so Mitch went on in and climbed the stairs to the second floor.

All the lights were on in the big examination room with its work benches and the shelves loaded with equipment, all the microscopes and the scales and the jars of casting materials and electric motors and the chromatograph and the U.V. and infra-red stuff, and the test tubes and beakers and jars and hammers and saws and knives and enough stuff to keep you busy for a year just learning what they were and what for. Jub, wearing his tan smock, was busy over a microscope, and Decker was studying the green-handled scratcher and making notes on three different kinds of colored paper.

Jub said, "Hi, Mitch. Got my dirt?"

Mitch took the envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Jub. The Lieutenant said, "Well? Run into anything?"

"Maybe," Mitch said, and told his story.

Jub lost interest in his microscope, and his bright eager eyes were fixed on Mitch. Decker listened intently, and the lines in his face got tougher and deeper.

"Brother!" he exclaimed when Mitch had finished. "It could be. What

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hit us was why, with all this excitement about Captain Hook, any dame in her right senses would stop there and wait quietly with the car window open, and not see somebody approach. Every woman under ninety would be so jittery she'd wham through the red light with her foot on the gas instead of the brake. But if the Inskip woman recognized the guy, that explains why she waited. If she knew him, we have a lead."

"That's what I figured," Mitch said modestly.

"She was killed a couple of blocks from her home," the Lieutenant said thoughtfully. "Somebody who knew her and knew her probable route could have waited at that intersection. If he called out to her, she'd stop and wouldn't be suspicious. Then he could walk over to the car and kill her."

Mitch nodded, and so did Jub. All three of them—their minds worked the same way. They'd seen the position of the body, noted that there was no sign of a struggle. She must have been shot first and then slashed, so the case was different from the other two. Either Captain Hook knew her and planned the murder, or else this wasn't Captain Hook at all but somebody who'd deliberately used the Hook technique to misdirect the police.

"On the facts we have now," Decker said, "the best guess is either this lover with the sweet tooth, or else her husband. And if it's Inskip —" he picked up the scratcher and stared at it—"then this thing can tell us."

"Prints?" Mitch asked.

Decker shook his head. Jub said, "There was dirt on it. Not much, but enough. If the soil you brought in matches up with it, then—bingo! Where'd you get it?"

"From a flowerbed next to the porch," Mitch said.

"Good," Jub said. "That ought to do it." He spread out a half dozen bits of paper and poured a pinch of dirt from the Inskip envelope onto each of them. "On the other hand," he said—and he didn't finish the sentence.

Decker did. "On the other hand, if the soil doesn't match up, then it looks like Inskip is cleared, and we go after this lover-boy of hers. A do-gooder with a sweet tooth, and his name may be on this list." He opened her address book and glanced through it. "Quite a few names here," he said. "We have some tough work ahead of us."

Mitch knew what that meant. Regular schedules would be suspended, and the Homicide Squad would be on 24-hour duty. Time off to sleep, but they'd be at it every night until they dropped. It had happened before, on a big case, and this was one of the biggest they'd ever had.

Mitch took a long slow breath. He slept at headquarters that night.

In the morning Lieutenant Decker held a conference in the Squad Room and briefed them on what had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happened. Most of what Decker summed up was information Mitch already knew, and what he didn't know turned out to be bad news. The soil from the Inskip flowerbed did not match the soil on the handle of the three-pronged scratcher.

Nevertheless, there was a feeling of excitement and tension in the Homicide Squad that morning, and it spread to the entire police force. They were on to something solid at last—negative but solid. Now they were aware that the Inskip murderer might not turn out to be Captain Hook, yet they were pretty sure they'd solve this one. It might not be easy, but they had a start and they all believed that eventually they'd turn up a clue that would break the case. After that, it would snowball.

Down at the Homicide Squad they knew in their bones it would happen exactly like that. Some insignificant detail, maybe overlooked at first, would link up with some other insignificant detail. It had to be that way.

The Homicide Squad spearheaded the investigation, but practically the entire detective force in the city was assigned to help out. Check into Inskip's background, the Inskip marriage, their finances, what the neighbors said about them. Question every person whose name was in Mrs. Inskip's address book. Trace her history, her affairs, where she'd been seen, with whom. Find out everything that people knew about her. Concentrate on where she'd been the night of her death, but don't stop there: find out what she'd done earlier in the day. Check with stores, restaurants, hotels.

Although Inskip's wife had been unfaithful and he stood to inherit a nice chunk of dough from her, the dirt scratcher pretty well cleared him. The police might get around to him again later on, as a last resort, but first things came first: the soil identification was an absolute must —that and finding the lover with the sweet tooth were tops on the list.

Meanwhile, Jub and his assistants went through soil tests, and drew one blank after another. Jub vacuum-cleaned the death car and analyzed every fiber, every bit of dust. But nothing came of it.

Mitch hardly saw Amy these hectic days, but he remembered those dwarf marigolds she wanted, and late one afternoon he drove out to the Inskip house and rang the bell. A dumpy female with tiny black eyes answered. She looked as if she wanted to go to the movies with Mitch and eat popcorn and hold hands. She said she was Inskip's sister and he wasn't feeling very well, but she wasn't busy right now and would Mitch like to come inside.

"What I came for," Mitch said, "was maybe I could dig up a few of those tiny marigolds. The wife kind of goes for them, and I thought if Mr. Inskip doesn't mind—"

"Oh," she said, as if Mitch's being married had busted up some kind of dream. But she survived all right,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and she didn't hold it against him.

"Go ahead," she said, to show her generosity. "Take all you want. They were Mrs. Inskip's, and my brother doesn't particularly like them. They're at the back of the house."

"Thanks," Mitch said.

He got the trowel from his car and dug up a few and packed them in a hunk of newspaper. Then he went back to headquarters and divided them up as Amy had told him to, half for her and half for Jub's wife, and he brought Jub's to the lab.

Jub wasn't there, so Mitch took the bunch and carried it back downstairs and left it in Jub's car. Later on, when Mitch went home to dinner, he brought Amy her half of the marigolds. He'd lost the trowel somewhere on the way, but he was still one up on the case: he'd gotten Amy's flowers out of it.

The next day everybody was still plugging away, but you could kind of feel the letdown. They'd gone off half cocked, they'd been too sure of themselves, and the papers were riding the police again.

One by one the names in Mrs. Inskip's address book got crossed off, and the Homicide Squad was slipping back into the nightmare of having nothing to grab hold of. And the Captain Hook switchboard was getting twice the calls it used to—from all the cranks who knew a do-gooder with a sweet tooth as well as those who knew a psycho with a beard.

On the fifth day Mitch was running down a tip about a Boy Scout leader who liked fudge and bought it wholesale, and Mitch felt like a dope when he asked his questions. He was driving Number 4, his regular car, and he'd just spoken to the manager of a candy factory and had drawn another blank, along with some wisecracks about whether the police were tracking down a killer or just wanted to learn the caramel business.

When Mitch came out to start his car, his radio phone buzzed and he picked it up.

"Taylor, Car Four," he said.

"Report to Lieutenant Decker at once," the sergeant said. "Please acknowledge."

Mitch did, then hung up and started back. He drove at his usual pace, wondering what the hell the Lieutenant wanted now. And why pick on him, for Pete's sake. He was feeling low, like the rest of the squad, and asking himself how long they could keep looking for somebody who maybe didn't even exist. After all, how did they know there was such a guy, except that Inskip had heard his wife say something on the phone, and he'd told how she made candy for someone. And maybe Inskip was all mixed up.

Nobody was excited about anything when Mitch got back to headquarters, and the girl in the outer office said Decker was up in the lab, to go see him there. So Mitch trudged up the flight of stairs and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked in. Jub whirled and looked happy, and Decker jumped off a stool like he'd been goosed.

"Taylor," he said, "Where'd you get that trowel?"

"Trowel?" Mitch said, stalling and trying to get his bearings.

"The one you left here for me. The other day," Jub said, "while I was out."

"That?" Mitch said, glad that he hadn't lost the thing after all. "It's Amy's. I been looking for it. Why?"

"Because the soil on it matches the soil on the scratcher," Decker said, and he was all steamed up. "Where did you use it?"

Mitch blinked. "I dug up some marigolds at the Inskips," he said. "They were in a special flowerbed in the back."

"Brother!" Decker yelled. "If the Inskips brought in special soil for that flowerbed, then it would be different from all the other samples around the house. That's why we went wrong, but now we've got him!"

So, as Mitch told Amy that night, without her and those dwarf marigolds she wanted, maybe the case of Captain Hook would never have been cracked. But on account of them, they had Inskip cold. Once they went to work on him and got a warrant and tore the place apart, they found the false beard and the gun. And it was the same gun that had killed Grace Inskip.

After that the guy confessed. His wife's two-timing was more than he could take, but divorce was no good because she had all the dough and in a divorce she'd hang onto it. Then he hit on this idea of slashing a couple of dames and setting up a pattern so that, when he killed his wife, it would look like another Captain Hook murder, unmotivated and completely unconnected with the Inskip marital troubles.

Amy listened in a kind of shock. "How horrible!" she said, when Mitch had finished. "And those marigolds—I don't want them, I don't even want to see them. Throw them out."

"Look," Mitch said. "What's there to get so excited about?"

"I can't look at them," Amy exclaimed. "It's awful—you just don't understand."

Mitch frowned at her and tried to figure it out. She wanted flowers, didn't she? So if she had something against marigolds, he'd get her some other kind. That florist up on Emerson, for instance, could give him some good advice. If Mitch went up there and asked him, and then maybe mentioned a violation or two, the guy would be glad to give him some stuff for free. No real problem there.

The only thing was, Mitch had to get another trowel, on account Amy's was up in the lab and Jub was hanging onto it. And somehow, it just didn't seem right—Mitch having to get Amy another trowel. And he'd have to buy it too—there was no way he could think of to get one for free.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *complete SHORT NOVEL* of crime by

VICTOR CANNING

Anthony Boucher has described this short novel as "wholly delightful a crime story as I have read since—I am tempted to say, since the youth of Simon Templar, if not that of Arsène Lupin. French-English Paul Langley Ashcroft is a young rogue in the grand manner; and his intricate misadventures on the Riviera had me happily chortling aloud."

Yes, captivating, enchanting, rollicking, charming are the words for Victor Canning's short crime novel about a young man on a bicycle who felt that the world was his oyster, that it owed him a living in the grand style (to which he was not always accustomed), a young man who had a most curious philosophy of economics—he was a victim (there is no other word for it) of philanthropy . . .

LOVE AND LARCENY ON THE RIVIERA

by VICTOR CANNING

THE YOUNG MAN ON THE BICYcle was very happy. Life was good and the day was fine. The sky above the blue Mediterranean was cloudless, the heat from the sun was making the seed pods of the broom on the red cliffs crack and pop, and away ahead of him on the coast road he could just make out the white sprawl of villas that rose from the harbor of the town where he meant to spend the night.

Yes, today life was good. Tomorrow? Well, if by tomorrow the last of his few francs had been spent on dinner and a night's lodging, he, Paul Langley Ashcroft, had no doubt that something would turn up.

Paul was a pleasant-looking young man, with an engaging face that creased naturally into a smile, the kind of face that invited confidences and inspired trust, and he was well aware that it was his most valuable asset . . . that and a ready tongue. He wore a straw boater, cocked Chevalier-fashion, a neat gray suit, and a bow tie as bright as a tropical butterfly.

Strapped to the carrier of his bicycle was a large suitcase and various oddly shaped parcels, while along the crossbar were tied an umbrella and a silver-headed walking stick. From the handle bars dangled two straw-covered flasks of wine. The bicycle

Copyright 1955 by Victor Canning; originally titled, "Young Man on a Bicycle."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the parcels were all rather dusty, but Paul himself looked bright and fresh. Dust found it hard to settle on him.

As he rode he whistled, and now and again he made little swerving motions across the road as though he needed the extra exercise to release his exuberant energy. The tune Paul whistled was *The World Owes Me a Living*. This was his philosophy —and it was surprising how easy he found it to make the world pay up.

His methods, of course, were questionable—but the money came. He used what he wanted for himself —and then gave the rest away to those to whom the world also owed a living, but who hadn't got the same grasp of economics as himself. And when the money was all gone, he took to his bicycle and moved on to fresh enterprises, as he was doing now.

The road began to dip downhill toward a little cove, its white strip of sand fringed by tall red-trunked pines. Paul put his feet on the handle bars and coasted. Halfway down the hill and facing the sea was a large villa, a great pink and white wedding cake of a place, hedged around with black and gold ornamental railings, cut into cool, cypress-studded terraces, towers, balconies, tiled loggias, and, out of sight at the moment, no doubt a private beach. The whole thing was an expensive monument to bad taste. Paul regarded it lovingly. He had long ago decided that if you were interested in money you had to shut your eyes to bad taste.

The main gates fronting the road had stone columns stuck all over with lozenge-shaped tiles and were surrounded by two figures of bearded seagods holding forked spears and sitting uncomfortably on curled fish-tails. Picked out in gilded letters across the ornamental gateway were the words *Villa Triton*.

To one side of the gate was a large wooden notice board. Paul put his feet down and braked gently to a stop. Resting his feet on the ground he read the notice and the whistling died from him. For a moment his face was quite solemn, then the sparkle gleamed in his eyes again and slowly the whistle came back —a fat, rich contented whistle.

The board announced that the villa was To Let, Furnished. The agents had their offices in the town on the far side of the bay.

The bicycle rolled on down the hill. Two hundred yards beyond the villa a little wood of pines and tall heather ran up the hillside. Paul dismounted and, with a quick look up and down the road, pushed his bicycle into the trees. He found a sheltered dip crested by heather and began to unpack his suitcase.

The first thing he took out was a square of mirror with a loop of string round it. He hung this on a pine branch and studied his face carefully in it, running one hand over his fair hair as he did so. It was a good face, honest, healthy, and, when he wished, capable of a hint of gentle melancholy which wealthy, middle-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aged women found irresistible—to their cost.

But for the time being, he decided, it was a face which had to be hidden. He began to unpack the rest of his things from his suitcase and unshipped the silver-headed cane from the bicycle crossbar. And as he worked he whistled, but it was now the low absent whistle of a man who is thinking and planning hard . . .

When the gate bell rang, Mme. Fouret was taking her siesta on the chaise longue in the housekeeper's room, a pleasant, cool room that overlooked a small side garden where a fountain splashed musically into a great alabaster bowl. She frowned and let it ring twice in the hope that the caller would go away. The gardener was out for the afternoon and she had no desire to answer the gate herself.

The bell went on ringing and reluctantly she stood up. She was a tall angular woman with a pale white face and tight-drawn black hair. She had the eye of an eagle, the mouth of a slave driver, and a heart that pulsed with romantic yearnings the moment she came into contact with any man over forty-five. Dressed in black, her keys swinging at her waist, she went through the house and out into the heat-struck garden like a tall harpy ready to hurl the bolts of her fury at any frivolous intruder.

Within five minutes her heart was captive and pulsing pleasingly. Standing at the gate was an elderly monsieur of the most dignified appearance. He wore a beard and a little waxed mustache. A pair of friendly blue eyes twinkled at her. His voice was cultured and deliberate as he half bowed and said, "Madame, *chère madame*, a thousand apologies for disturbing you at this uncivilized hour of the afternoon. But my good friend M. Reynaud—" for a moment the silver head of his cane was tipped toward the agent's name on the notice board—"insisted that I come immediately—but immediately."

He looked up at the villa. "What a charming place, a pearl . . . It is for something like this that I have been looking ever since my dear wife died." Just for a second the blue eyes under the bushy eyebrows were on Mme. Fouret, warm and understanding and with a hint of melancholy in them.

"You wish to look over the villa, monsieur?"

"M. Durobat, madame." The bow this time was a little stiffer, more formal and very impressive, and Mme. Fouret was noticing the little button of the *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* in the lapel of the well-cut silk suit, the pearl pin in the black stock at his throat, the spats and the well-brushed velour hat. An industrialist, retired, she wondered . . . ? Maybe a wealthy professor, a savant . . . ?

But no matter what, a man of presence. His accent was not Parisian. There was a trace of something that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she could not place in it. Maybe a retired colonial administrator? But whatever he was she became putty in his hands.

She escorted him into the villa, showed him around, stood by while he admired pictures and porcelain, and she silently commended him for paying as much attention to the conveniences of bathrooms and kitchens as he did to works of art. When they had exhausted the villa she took him around the gardens. Where the terrace steps were steep he gallantly offered her his arm and for a while she almost forgot that she was merely the housekeeper of the Comte d'Auxier.

Before he went she made a tisane for him and they drank it by the fountain outside her room, talking together easily, as though they had long been friends. By the time M. Durobat left the villa he knew a great deal about its owner Comte d'Auxier and about Mme Fouret. The Comte d'Auxier was in Paris and due to leave for America in a few days. And Mme. Fouret, he learned, had only been housekeeper in the villa for the last four years.

M. Durobat refused to let Mme. Fouret come with him to the gate. "You have already exhausted yourself too much on my behalf, *chère madame*." He leaned forward, took her hand and kissed it. "*Au revoir*."

M. Durobat walked down the hill toward the cove and he was careful to be well out of sight of the villa before he entered the little wood and returned to his bicycle.

Two hours later Paul Ashcroft, suitcase in hand, walked up the wide steps of the Hotel Argenta and booked a room for the night. By going without dinner he reckoned that he would have just enough money to start operating.

At seven o'clock he put a call through to Paris from his room. He lay on his bed while he waited for it to come through, and he was relaxed and happy and whistling gently to himself.

A gruff voice at the other end of the line said, "*Bar des Sports*."

"I want to speak to Felix," said Paul.

"He is busy."

"Tell him to stop playing cards. This is Paul—"

"Ha, Paul. *Mais, oui* . . ."

A little later another voice said, "Then you are not in prison, Paul? They tell me from Perpignan that—"

"They tell you a lot of nonsense, Felix. Now listen, I want you to do something for me."

"Anything but lend money. With money, Paul, you are hopeless. *Diable*, the luck you have but always you get rid of your money stupidly. It is a pity about your father—"

"What's my father got to do with this?"

"Your mother she was French, and your father English. *Mon gar*, it makes the pattern. From her you learn the value of money, but always from your father's side you find

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ways of being foolish with it. Anything but money I do for you."

"I don't want money. I want two telegrams from Paris. You'll sign them both as the Comte d'Auxier. You'll send one to Mme. Fouret here at the Villa Triton—"

"She is young, good-looking, wealthy?"

"No."

"A pity. For the day you really fall in love I wait. That day you do something extraordinary. I have envy to live to see it—"

"Felix, listen to me. You talk too much. Send a telegram to Mme. Fouret saying that you—as Comte d'Auxier—have withdrawn the Villa Triton from the market and have lent it to an English friend of yours, M. Paul Ashcroft, for the summer. He arrives tomorrow."

And the other?"

"Exactly the same only to the house agents here . . ." Paul dictated the addresses to Felix, and then went on, "And keep all this to yourself, Felix."

"But certainly, Paul. And this time try and save the money. You are clever, but always you end up with a bicycle and a suitcase. What kind of future is that?"

"Go back to your game and leave the future to me."

Paul rang off. For a moment as he lay back on the bed and stared at the ceiling his face was solemn. People worried too much about the future. That was all right when you began to get old around thirty-five, but at twenty-eight the present was the important thing—the fat, rich, happy present. The solemn look went from his face and he grinned. At this moment of the present he was hungry.

He went down to the wide expensive reaches of the hotel and found the American Bar. He ordered himself a glass of mineral water, and quite unmoved by the bartender's disapproval he began to make a meal from the olives, potato chips, and cheese snacks. The pickles he left alone. They always gave him indigestion.

After a while a middle-aged man and woman came into the bar and ordered two dry Martinis. They were Americans and the man wore a hand-painted silk tie showing the Seven Wonders of the World.

And then, when Paul was just starting on his second dish of potato chips, another person came into the bar.

Paul, who was a very susceptible young man, fell in love with her at once. Now this wasn't surprising. Women, he considered, were the most wonderful creatures on earth and it was not unusual for him to fall in love three or four times a day. It was a harmless exercise and he seldom did anything about it. His heart would just give a quick bump and a feeling would spread through his body as though he had just swallowed a glass of brandy in a hurry.

But with this girl it was rather

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

different. His heart gave a louder bump than usual and he felt as though he had swallowed a large glass of Pernod without water. Sensibly he put the exaggerated sensations down to a tiring day and an empty stomach.

She was French. As she ordered a glass of tonic water from the bartender her voice made this clear. And she was hungry and short of money. This Paul realized from the manner in which the bartender served her and the despairing roll of his eyes as she, too, began to make a free meal from the bar savories.

In the old days, thought Paul, one went to a monastery for a free meal and hot soup, but nowadays the American bars of the de luxe hotels were the great dispensers of charity.

He smiled at the girl as he caught her eye. She looked through him coldly for three seconds and then turned away. He shifted a little on his seat as he weathered the second impression of a neat Pernod coursing through him.

Wonderful, he thought; a wonderful creature with a neat, pretty little head, crowned with loose black curls, a brown healthy skin, a flash of scarlet lips, the most beautiful, half-bare shoulders over which she wore a green silk scarf, and a body that was sheer poetry . . . "She walks in beauty like the night . . ." quoted Paul to himself and noticed that she had a small run in her left stocking. It made the picture perfect for him.

A moment later, as she reached out for a dish of olives, she knocked her large handbag from the bar counter to the floor. Paul and the American with the tie started for it, but the American won. Normally, Paul was a fast starter and could have beaten the middle-aged American easily, but this time he was a little slow off the mark because he was wondering why the girl had knocked her bag deliberately to the ground. He soon knew.

As the American placed the bag back on the counter, saying, "Your bag, mademoiselle . . ." it toppled over and, being open from the fall, a small bronze statuette fell out.

The girl said, "Thank you, monsieur," in English and stood the statuette up on the bar. It was a figure of the Greek god Hermes.

"Oh, how cute. Isn't that cute, dear?" said the American's wife who, with the sharp instinct of all women, had come around his flank and was now edging between him and the girl.

"You like it?" The girl was smiling at them. Her accent when she spoke English, Paul decided, improved the language.

"Certainly do, mademoiselle. Why it's a perfect little thing."

"It's lovely, *n'est-ce pas?* He was the god of science and commerce and the patron of travelers." The girl's hand caressed the statuette lovingly for a moment. "One of the fishermen here brought it up in his net. It happens, you know, from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to time. So many Roman galleys were sunk off this coast in the ancient days. I'm very fond of my little god."

But not so fond of him, Paul knew, that she wouldn't be prepared to sell him. And in about five minutes she had, for $30. "A genuine antique from the bottom of the Mediterranean. Gee, that's something."

When the Americans had gone into the dining room, the girl stayed on for a few moments at the bar while the bartender changed her dollars into francs.

Paul caught her eye. Something was wrong with her. Normally when he was in love he was content to worship from afar. Now he felt he wanted to draw closer.

"A beautiful little figure, mademoiselle," he said smiling, his eyes going over her. "But also you should have told them that he was the patron of rogues, vagabonds, and—"

"There is no need for monsieur to improve my classical knowledge." She gathered up a bundle of francs from the bartender.

"But of course, mademoiselle. There is nothing about you that needs improvement."

She gave him the beginning of a frown, changed it to the beginning of a smile, and then decided on the frown. Pursing her lips a little she said, "*Zut!*" and walked out of the bar.

Charming, delicious . . . Paul's heart gave a couple of loud bumps, and heady with emotion he said to the bartender, "Who is she?"

Rather stiffly the bartender answered, "Monsieur, I do not discuss the people who take free meals at my bar. For me they do not exist."

Paul arrived at the Villa Triton at three o'clock the next afternoon. He had hired a chauffeur-driven car for the week. In addition to his own, he had two suitcases which he had bought in a junk shop and stuffed with old papers and a few heavy stones, and a large bunch of dark red roses which he presented to an unwelcoming Madame Fouret.

She was stiff and prim and full of disappointment. Only that morning, because of this young English friend of the Count's, M. Durobat had telephoned to say that he would not be taking the villa after all as he understood from the agents that the Count had withdrawn it from the market. She herself had received a telegram confirming this early that morning.

"The roses, madame, are for you," said Paul, presenting them to her. "When I left the Count after he had so kindly, and so generously offered me the villa for the summer, he said, 'But above all you must look after Mme. Fouret well for me.' He has a great affection for you, madame. So I ask myself what is the first step to a woman's heart—and the answer is roses. You like roses, I hope?"

Mme. Fouret did and she felt her-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self soften a little toward him as she took them. Only yesterday talking in the garden about flowers with dear M. Durobat she had confessed that dark red roses were her favorites.

"You are very kind, monsieur," she said.

She didn't thaw right away but the signs were there and Paul was in no hurry. He had all summer before him. She showed him around the villa and from his knowledge of the place he was able to pretend that he had stayed there before. Finally, she left him in the Count's bedroom, a wide, airy room with a balcony overlooking the private beach, a room with a great bed shaped like a conch shell and hung with blue silk curtains, a room with a soft blue carpet into which the feet sank with a luxurious, whispering noise.

Before she went Mme. Fouret asked, "You will dine here tonight, monsieur?"

"No, madame. I have friends in town with whom I dine. Tomorrow we will talk about engaging more servants. I have many friends in the district and shall entertain a little, you understand. But everything will be left to you. The Count assures me that in your hands these matters are accomplished to perfection. You would not, I suppose, madame, consider leaving the Count's service and coming with me to England at the end of the summer?"

"Oh, monsieur, that is not the way to treat your friendship with the Count." Mme. Fouret laughed, but the compliment was like the first warmth of a liqueur inside her. He was young, and English—so much against him—and he had deprived her of M. Durobat; but even so, she liked the way his eyes sparkled and the deference he paid her. Given another twenty years and he would have been perfect.

"For a pearl like you, madame, I would jeopardize any friendship. Look at this villa so beautifully kept. One has only to walk into the place to understand that the Mme. Fourets of this world are rare indeed."

When she was gone Paul unpacked his own suitcase. He owned the suit he wore, evening clothes, a pair of white flannels, a blue blazer, and, of course, M. Durobat's outfit. This last he locked away in one of the other cases.

He borrowed a bathing suit and a beach robe from the Count's closet and went down to the sea. He sunbathed for an hour and if he had been a cat he would have purred. Things were going well, and he knew that Mme Fouret would give him no trouble.

Coming up from the beach in his robe, he wandered quietly through the villa. Comte d'Auxier was obviously a very wealthy man. Paul went through each room price-tagging its contents with an acumen any insurance assessor would have envied. When he eventually reached his bedroom the large pockets of the beach robe were full of small but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

valuable articles which Mme. Fouret would not immediately miss—four silver ashtrays, a small jade Buddha, a silver inkstand, and a little miniature of Marie Antoinette painted on ivory.

As Paul with great care wrapped and packed them all into a parcel he totaled their value—with luck 4000 francs. That, he told himself, would be enough to set the ball rolling, that and luck, and only a fool ever questioned his luck.

He took a shower and changed leisurely into his evening clothes as the dusk came idly in across the sea turning it to a dark ultramarine. The air through the open window was full of the secret of syringa, jasmine, and oleanders, and a few fireflies were dancing under the branches of a pomegranate tree. He stood at the window taking it all in, and the odd thing was that for a while he almost felt that he really was a friend of Comte d'Auxier, that he had a right to be here, that he really was a wealthy young Englishman whose father owned a boot-and-shoe factory in the Midlands as he had hinted to Mme. Fouret.

The only thing missing was someone to share it all—someone young, with dark eyes, red lips, and a head of black curls. He sighed. For about twenty seconds he almost regretted having to invent his own fictions and live them.

The sight of the paper parcel on his bed brought him back to himself. He picked up the house telephone and asked Mme. Fouret to tell the hired chauffeur to bring the car around.

He drove into town sitting next to the chauffeur. Paul preferred always to talk to people, rather than to be on his own. He had an enormous curiosity about them, especially those who suffered from the unimaginative system of economics against which he had rebelled. Already he knew that Mme. Fouret had a sister in the town who was convinced that a month's treatment —alas, too expensive even to be considered—at Aix-les-bains would cure her rheumatism. And from the chauffeur he learned now that his son's ambition was to study music at the Paris conservatoire—ambitions, dreams, fading hopes—people were full of them.

The lights were on along the waterfront, looping away like a great line of colored beads; the front of the Casino was floodlit, and an idle happy evening crowd eddied gently across the road.

He had the car stop outside a rather dingy-looking jeweler's shop.

As he went inside there was a girl standing at the counter talking to the shopman.

He heard her say, "All right, a thousand, but you are a rogue and I hope at supper tonight your bad conscience gives you indigestion."

He knew the voice and he knew the girl. Even in the gloom of the shop the black curls shone. He drew back into the shadows as the jeweler

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

answered, "Good business and a bad conscience, Mlle. Elise, they go together. As for indigestion I have been a martyr to it for twenty years. One thousand francs for your ring, and if you wish to buy it back at any time you can have it for eleven hundred."

"*Monstre!*"

From her, Paul decided, the word was a compliment, and he saw the old man smile as he passed the money over. As she turned toward the door, Paul—a sense of delicacy was strong in him—pretended to study some coffee cups in a case, his back to her. When she had gone he went up to the counter and spread the contents of his parcel before the jeweler.

Elise, what a name. It described her perfectly—Elise.

"Her other name is Benoit, monsieur, and for the next hour she will be taking her supper at the *Dauphin Vert* which is a little cafe five hundred yards beyond the Casino."

Paul looked at him in astonishment. "Did I say her name aloud?"

"You did, monsieur, but I do not blame you. You are at the age. Now, what have we here?"

He was a bent-up little man who looked as though he had spent most of his life trying to bore a hole through the top of his breastbone with his chin. He examined the things Paul had brought carefully.

"To sell or to pawn?"

"To raise a loan, papa, for a few days."

"Two thousand."

"Really, papa . . ." Paul shook his head sadly. "The little miniature of Marie Antoinette is worth that. Beautiful, isn't it? They say she washed in nothing but milk."

"She lost her head. Twenty-five hundred."

"Five thousand, papa. If I don't come back you make a profit of two thousand."

The old man looked at Paul's evening dress. "You go to the Casino, perhaps? Then you won't come back. Three thousand at ten per cent interest a day. You know it is illegal for me to do this?"

"We all have our worries, papa. The pawnshop is shut and I need the money tonight. The little Buddha is exquisite. It should be in the Louvre. Thirty-five hundred and seven per cent a day."

"Maybe the little Buddha does come from the Louvre? You have, perhaps, the Mona Lisa as well?"

"Next week, papa."

The man's chin came off his chest and a pair of watery brown eyes stared at Paul. Then he smiled and began to collect the objects together. "Thirty-three hundred at—"

"Seven per cent."

The old man shrugged and got the money from his till.

Paul picked up the notes and then he counted out one thousand fifty francs and passed them back.

"What is this for, monsieur?"

"The ring that belongs to Mlle. Elise Benoit, papa."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Eleven hundred, monsieur."

Paul shook his head sadly. "Papa, were you never in love? Does a woman's distress mean nothing to you?"

The old man smiled. "Yes, and yes, my son. But now I am sixty and in business. It is you who are in love. Is that a time to be mean and to argue over fifty francs?"

Paul passed over another fifty francs and the ring was handed to him in a little box. As Paul left the shop the jeweler called after him,

"She has a temper at times, my son. But do not be alarmed. It is the salt that brings out the true savor of love. *Bonne chance!*"

Outside Paul dismissed his chauffeur and walked along to the *Dauphin Vert.*

Elise was sitting in a little alcove with a glass of white wine and a plate of *moules marinières.* Paul walked up to her and with a smile took the other seat at the table.

"*Bonsoir, Mlle. Benoit,*" he said.

"*Bonsoir, monsieur je-ne-sais-qui,* and I would like to point out that there are plenty of other tables unoccupied at which you might sit."

"Ashcroft is the name, Paul Ashcroft. I have often said that only a Frenchwoman knows how to eat shellfish with grace and elegance, and you, mademoiselle, are all grace and elegance."

"For an Englishman you speak French too well."

"My mother was French."

She was watching him closely, her face a little grave but with the hint of amusement somewhere in her eyes.

"Then your mother should have instructed you that a gentleman does not sit uninvited at a lady's table."

"My mother was very absent-minded, mademoiselle. She must have forgotten."

"You wish to talk to me?"

"If you like. But I am quite happy just to watch you."

Paul looked at her and he could have gone on looking for hours. It was odd, really. He had seen girls as beautiful before, and had fallen in love with them. But not with quite such a bump and such a boost to the blood circulation. The way she fished a mussel from its shell and carried it to that lovely mouth was sheer poetry; the way her arms moved—he sighed.

"It would be better, monsieur, perhaps if you talked. When you just look you have a silly expression on your face." She smiled fleetingly.

"Mademoiselle, I am in love with you."

She nodded gravely and then ate two more mussels, took a sip of wine, and finally said, "So?"

"That is all. I am in love with you."

She looked at him shrewdly for a moment and then, cocking one eyebrow in a movement that entranced Paul, said, "You are certain that your father was an Englishman and not a Spaniard?"

Paul nodded. "Ashcroft. James

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wigmore Ashcroft, the biggest boot manufacturer in the Midlands of England. The firm was started during the Crimean War, supplying boots to the army."

"Ah, I understand. It happens during every war. Profiteering. So your father makes boots. What do you make?"

"I spend the money he makes making boots. And I am in love with you."

"So, now we have had your biography. At least it has the merit of being short—if dull. Or maybe you wish to sell me some boots?"

"I wish just to be with you."

"You are a young man who usually gets what he wants?"

"But of course."

"It is good then that for once you should be disappointed. Raoul!" She raised her voice a little and called to the waiter.

"You wish for something else?" said Paul eagerly. "Please let me order it."

"It is not necessary, monsieur. I can order for myself."

Raoul came to the table. He was big, blue-jowled, and muscularly amiable.

"Mlle. Elise?" The way he spoke showed that for her he would do anything. Paul knew just how he felt.

"Raoul, tell this gentleman that if he has not left the place within ten seconds you will be obliged to throw him out."

Raoul grinned. "*Avec plaisir . . . c'est un de ces types, eh?* Monsieur?" he turned to Paul.

Paul rose.

"I'm going. But the wonderful fact remains that I love you."

Raoul answered for her.

"It is not a wonder, monsieur. The whole town loves mademoiselle. You are one among many. *Et puis, alors, va-t'en!*"

He advanced on Paul who backed away with good grace, gave Elise a little bow, and then made for the door. But behind him on the table, to be discovered by her later, Paul left the little box with the ring in it.

Half an hour later Paul, elated with love, was at the Casino shrewdly looking round the over-rich crowd in search of his first victim. Paul never gambled at the Casinos, there was little excitement in it for him, and he knew better ways of gaining and getting rid of money.

Within ten minutes his mind was made up. He picked a Signora Busoni—he obtained those facts later—the middle-aged widow of a Milan industrialist (silk, motor scooters, and a patent cream for developing the bust), wearing a magenta dress, plump, a little giggly, and with a thick frost of diamonds about her neck and wrists.

He watched her play for a while, then followed her into the bar, and in no time at all was sharing a bottle of champagne with her.

He drank, toasting, "La bella Italia," and then, lowering his glass, an appealing melancholy in his eyes,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he blinked as her diamonds glittered like chips of blue ice. Before he left her their friendship was well underway.

Within a week Paul was firmly established at the villa. He engaged a cook and a couple of maids to help Mme. Fouret, and he now began to entertain. Chiefly Signora Busoni. And through Signora Busoni he was introduced to other wealthy people in the district. M. Paul became a great favorite, always smiling, always so gay, always ready to throw himself into the spirit of a party.

Madame Fouret quite took him to heart. She was never neglected. He gave her little presents and was full of compliments for the way she ran the house for him. And for her it was a pleasure to have the villa alive with people, to have around her always the stir of a happy, changing company. Comte d'Auxier had seldom done any entertaining.

At the beginning of the second week Paul decided that he must start work. His money was running out.

On an evening when he was due to call for Signora Busoni and take her to a party, he telephoned her.

"Signora, I have to drive to Cannes on urgent business this evening. I am heartbroken. But I will be back as soon as I can and join you at the party . . . Yes, very urgent business, *cara signora*. It would have to be to tear me away from such a charming companion."

He heard her rich giggle at the other end of the line.

He waited an hour and then took his car out without the chauffeur. He drove along the coast, through the town, and then parked about half a mile beyond Signora Busoni's villa, which faced the sea.

He knew the villa well from his visits there, and he knew, too, that the old couple who looked after it for Signora Busoni always spent their evenings in the kitchen playing cards and arguing with one another.

Whistling gently to himself, he walked back along the road to the villa, keeping in the shadows. Ten minutes later he was in the villa garden, but not whistling now. He could see a light in the back of the villa where the old couple sat in the kitchen.

He pulled on a pair of black gloves and a few moments later was climbing up one of the pillars of the balcony that fronted Signora Busoni's bedroom. He went in through the French windows and, once inside, pulled the heavy curtains and switched on the light. He crossed to the door and locked it on the inside.

It was a small room, floridly decorated, its air heavy with perfume. He stood with a reflective smile on his face. The trouble with wealthy widows like Signora Busoni, apart from not willingly sharing their good fortune with others, was that they talked too much. Already he knew where the safe was—behind a small picture near the bed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He took the picture down and eyed the safe quizzically. It had a combination lock. From long experience Paul knew that it might take him from five minutes to three hours to listen to the fall of the tumblers and break the combination. Women hated such locks. They were always afraid of forgetting the combination.

It took him only fifteen minutes to find where Signora Busoni had written the combination. It was in a little telephone number book in a drawer of an escritoire near the window. She'd listed it as "Busoni 7835," which Paul knew was not the telephone number of her villa.

He opened the safe door and within five minutes the contents of the jewel cases were deposited in the bottom of a silk pillow case that he took from the bed. He went around the room and skimmed the cream of its contents, putting them one by one in the pillow case—the silver dressing-table fittings, a gold wristlet watch, and, surprisingly, a photograph of Signora Busoni in a plain leather frame.

Then, after unlocking the bedroom door, Paul drew the curtains and left. It was all done quietly and calmly. A young man in evening dress and black gloves occupying himself soberly with his professional business—a young man who knew that the world was his oyster and had no intention of letting the knife slip and cut him as he opened it.

Signora Busoni was delighted when Paul arrived at the party just before midnight. She was delighted when he danced with her, and delighted when he offered to drive her home. She would not have been delighted had she known what was locked in the trunk of his car.

He went in with her for a drink before he left for his own villa.

"Fix yourself a drink, *caro* Paul, while I go up and get rid of this wrap and freshen my face."

"Can I mix one for you?"

"No, thank you."

As she disappeared up the stairs Paul poured himself a large brandy and also one for her. He knew she would need it when she came down. He knew so well how the scene would go—and quite frankly it was the one moment in the whole process which he did not like. Taking money from the rich caused him no qualms; but the sight of distress on any woman's face always disturbed him.

The whole scene went exactly as he knew it would. Signora Busoni appeared at the head of the stairs, a large, plumpish figure in a purple evening gown, a thick rope of pearls about her neck, and throwing her arms high cried, "Paul. Oh, Paul! The most terrible thing! I've been robbed."

And then she was bouncing down the stairs as fast as she could, crying "The police! The police!"

Paul stopped her at the bottom of the stairs with a glass of brandy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He helped her to a chair and fussed around her.

"Drink your brandy, dear signora. It is the best thing for shock. What a dreadful affair . . . and while you were dancing so happily . . . There, there, don't move, I shall arrange everything." He filled her glass again, and then said, "May I go up and have a look? I have some experience in these matters."

"Oh, Paul, you are so kind—such a comfort at a moment like this."

"Sit there, dear signora, and leave everything to me."

Paul disappeared upstairs and was soon down again. He stood in front of Signora Busoni, his face solemn and thoughtful.

"What is it, Paul?" she asked.

"You know exactly what has been taken?"

"But of course. I have only to look to tell." And Signora Busoni rattled off a list which omitted nothing, as Paul well knew. She finished up, "Even a photograph of myself the thief took."

Paul looked speculatively at her. "Really? A photograph?" He was silent, his brows puckered in thought.

"Why do you look like that, Paul?"

He put a hand on her shoulder comfortingly. "It was just a thought. Still, there might be something in it." Then with a shake of his head he said, "No, there couldn't be. Our best plan is to inform the police." As he moved toward the telephone he seemed to say to himself, "But it's odd—very odd. I wonder . . .?"

"Paul, what's in your mind? Tell me. Why should a thief take a valueless photograph?"

He turned back to her, nursing his glass of brandy.

"Signora Busoni," he said gravely, "I think, maybe, I can answer that question. I think, maybe, I see some hope—"

"You do?" she cried expectantly. "Oh, Paul, tell me."

He took her hand and stroked it sympathetically.

"You must be patient with me. You see, some years ago while I was staying in Marseilles I did a service for a man who is known as Gringo the Greek. He is—well, a big man in the underworld there. A thief but an unusual one. I do not wish to go into the details of the help I gave him except that it was quite legitimate and he was very grateful."

"You think he stole my jewels?"

"I am certain, dear Signora. You see, I became very friendly with him and once he took me to his house and showed me an extraordinary thing. All around his room there were photographs of men and women. It is a kind of kink with him that whenever he does a job he takes a photograph of the person he has robbed."

"What a scoundrel!"

"In some ways, yes. But in others, no. He is a man who has a good side to him."

"For that I care nothing, Paul,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said Signora Busoni sharply. "We must telephone the police about him at once."

"But of course." He moved toward the telephone. Then he stopped and turned toward her, his eyes full of friendly concern. "But would it help? He will have alibis, and you may never see your jewels again. But because you are my friend, dear signora, and I would do anything for you, I could go to him. He will do anything for me."

"You mean that he would give you my things back?" There was a rising note of hope in her voice.

"Well, not quite . . . But he might sell them back."

"But why should I pay for my own jewels!" Hope was now replaced by outrage.

Paul nodded. "Of course, it's preposterous, dear signora." He filled her brandy glass for her again. "But look at it this way. If we call in the police, isn't there a great risk you won't get your jewels back at all? Gringo's very clever, and very slippery."

He paused, sipping his brandy. "But he's a man who always remembers his friends. If I could talk to him." He saw that she was hanging on his every word now. This was the moment, the fraction of time when a woman swings between two minds. "What are the jewels worth?" he asked.

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand francs at least."

"So, nearly ten thousand pounds. To return them and make a little profit for himself and to oblige me because you are my dear friend, he might charge, say, one thousand pounds . . . maybe I can persuade him to accept twelve thousand francs . . . No, no . . ." Paul turned away from her. "Perhaps the whole idea is stupid. Why should he do this for me? Maybe we *should* tell the police."

Signora Busoni considered this. Then her mind like a calculating machine produced its answer.

"Paul." Her voice was suddenly solemn behind him.

He turned.

"Paul, it would be worth trying—if you think you might get them back for that price?"

"I shall do everything—everything I can. But if it succeeds, signora, then no one must ever know. Our secret, *cara signora*. If the police knew we might both be in trouble."

"Paul, you must do this. Offer twelve thousand francs—but not a sou more!"

"Dear lady." Paul took her hand and kissed it. "Tomorrow I go to Marseilles. I shall do my best, of course."

Paul did do his best. Two days later Signora Busoni got her jewels back—for fifteen thousand francs. The money was paid in cash to Paul to be handed to Gringo. So far as Paul knew Gringo might no longer be alive. Long, long ago he had vaguely known a small crook of that name in Marseilles, and more than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

once he had used his name on occasions like this.

The cash went into a large, old-fashioned safe in the billiard room at the Villa Triton to which Mme. Fouret had given Paul the key.

The following morning Paul was sunbathing on the private beach when Mme Fouret brought a visitor down to him.

"Mlle. Benoit," she announced, and withdrew toward the villa, her back stiff and disapproving.

Paul stood up and the blood rushing to his head made the world turn over giddily before his eyes,—a swirl of blue sky, pink villa, and dark cypress trees, and at the center of the cartwheel a slim cool figure in a white silk dress, with a touch of scarlet scarf at the throat to match the soft scarlet lips. The wheel steadied and Elise was smiling at him.

"Monsieur, it has taken me a little while to find you."

"Call me Paul, please."

She hesitated for a moment, raised an eyebrow doubtfully and deliciously, and then with a little laugh she suddenly said, "All right—Paul."

"Thank you, Elise. Now the morning is perfect."

"I came to thank you for returning my ring. It was very generous of you. But I cannot accept it without—"

Paul frowned and stepped forward menacingly. "Elise, if you are now going to try and pay me back I shall pick you up and throw you into the sea. Can you swim?"

"Yes."

"A pity. Because I could then have jumped in and saved you. However, let us have no talk of money. I have more than I know what to do with."

"I was not going to offer you money. In the first place, it would be ungracious to spoil a generous act, and, secondly, I could not afford it. But in return I should like you to accept this . . ."

From behind her back she produced a little bronze figure of Hermes.

". . . it was brought up by a fisherman—"

"I know," said Paul. "It's beautiful. But this fisherman of ours, doesn't he ever catch fish?"

Elise laughed, and to Paul the sound was like a little burst of the most exquisite music on the hot morning air.

"Between ourselves, M. Paul—"

"Paul."

"Paul. I make them in my studio."

"But isn't it a little dishonest to tell this story—"

"About the fisherman? Why? All the world is just a little dishonest. If I sell one to an American for thirty dollars it really is worth that—and it pleases them to have a little story attached to it. Also, they think they have got a bargain—a Roman antique for thirty dollars! They go away thinking I am naive and have no sense of money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul smiled. "You make other fa—I mean, antiques?"

"A few. I can turn out anything from an unmistakable Picasso to an authentic Etruscan vase."

"You're wonderful."

"I am very good."

"And I love you, Elise."

"Monsieur, you should not say that lightly to any woman."

"I do not say it lightly to any woman. I say it to you and I mean it."

"And after it is said, what then?"

"It is out of my hands. It is up to the woman to advance or retreat, to say yes or no."

"You are a curious one. When you smile I do not believe what you say. But when you frown and have that sad look in your eyes, then I think maybe there is a real person somewhere."

"You will have dinner with me tonight? At the *Dauphin Vert?*"

"I regret—"

"At eight o'clock."

"Impossible."

"And I shall take you for a drive afterwards."

"You are ridiculous."

"But good company."

"You should go into your father's business instead of squandering his money. You would be good at selling boots. Au revoir, Paul. Eight o'clock."

After she had gone Paul sat in a quiet trance until lunchtime.

Some men hurry home from work to their wives and family. But more men hurry back to pursue some passion, like fretwork, pigeon-keeping, philately, square dancing, bowls, darts—something from which there is no escape. Victims of their own natures they live in happy bondage.

Paul was a victim—not of philately, but of philanthropy. He couldn't help it. His education had been all wrong—too much Robin Hood and not enough Adam Smith. His head was full of romance, and a dishonest life had turned the milk of human kindness in him to a rich, full cream. He held the selfish view that the best thing to do with money was to spend it on other people. It was a vice with him.

And now, being in love, the urge to throw money away was ten times as strong. He was in love and he wanted the world to be as happy as he was. After lunch he went into action. Even without Elise it would have happened. But now Paul was full of an even greater contempt for accepted economics.

While Mme. Fouret was safely having her siesta, Paul got his suitcase with the M. Durobat clothes and make-up and went down into the cellar under the villa. There he changed into the guise of M. Durobat, whistling contentedly to himself, and then made his way from the cellar through a narrow tunnel he had discovered that led to a small grotto in the garden.

An hour later he was in the town

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and things began to happen. A young typist in the bus office was surprised when a bearded, dignified old man with the button of the Legion of Honor walked in, raised his hat, presented her with a bottle of Chanel No. 5, and was gone before she could say a word. A woman at a stall in the market was surprised to find a two-hundred-franc note under her weights just after an old gentleman had bought some oranges from her. The oranges were given to a small boy who found in the bag with them a mouth organ.

In the early days of his new economic system Paul had found it hard to get rid of money. Most people, he knew, resented direct charity. The natural dignity and self-respect in people made them capable of facing their own problems. But there wasn't a person in the world who could resist a surprise, an extravagant, anonymous gift from heaven.

Such a one was Mme. Fouret's sister. That afternoon she was visited by M. Durobat who insisted that the vase he had seen in the window table in her little house was Sèvres and just the piece he had been looking for. He paid two thousand francs for it and walked off leaving her with the feeling that the world was crazy and delightful and the prospect of Aix-les-bains was now assured. The vase Paul dropped into the sea.

M. Durobat finished up the afternoon sitting on a seat in the garden of an orphanage run by the Convent of the Sacred Heart. All around him the children were at play. He had a decided weakness for children. While he was sitting there Sister Thérèse, who was in charge of the children, came and sat by him in the shade and very soon they were chatting to one another.

Sister Thérèse was a wrinkled old apple of a woman who looked as though she would keep forever. She had a heart of gold, a mind as keen as a new razor blade, and one conviction—that God and children and good drains were the most important things in life.

After a few moments she wrote M. Durobat down as wealthy, sentimental, and lonely, and she knew these were the qualities from which large subscriptions came. Privately she asked God in advance to forgive her for her worldly cupidity, and then went to work. She found it unexpectedly easy. When M. Durobat rose to go he pulled out his wallet and handed her four thousand francs.

"Sister, you will do me a kindness if you take this for the children."

"Monsieur is very generous."

"Not at all. It is easy to make money if you have the talent. But hard to spend it wisely. Spend it frivolously, sister. Buy the girls pink hair ribbons and the boys—well, you will know."

"Monsieur is very understanding. Some other time it will be a pleasure to show you round the orphanage. The bathrooms—they will distress

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you. For years we have dreamed of raising enough money to build a new wing. And the kitchen, monsieur—so difficult to keep clean, so unhygienic and old-fashioned. Yes, yes, you must see it all the next time you come."

M. Durobat left the town unobtrusively and picked up his bicycle from a little wood on the outskirts.

At the other end of his journey he hid the bicycle in the pine wood by the cove, and then went into the villa through the cellar.

Later that evening he motored into town to meet Elise. He spent three wonderful hours with her. Although she still did not take him seriously, she showed that she liked him, and after dinner they sat for an hour in the car on the coast road, watching the moon come up over the sea. It was the biggest, yellowest moon Paul had ever seen and he sat blissfully holding Elise's hand. He didn't try to kiss her. He was content just to be with her.

When he left her at her studio just before midnight he did not go home. He went to the Casino and found Signora Busoni there with some friends. He might be in love and not know what to do about it; but he was also in business and he more than knew what to do about that. That night he marked down a Madame Lepâtre, the wife of a Bordeaux wine merchant.

And so the days went on. Love and business. Paul saw Elise as much as he could and now knew a lot about her. She lived with her young brother who was an artist of great promise. But the two were very poor and it was Elise's ambition to save enough money for them to go to Paris where her brother could study.

M. Durobat was now known in the town as a mysterious figure who came and went, leaving cash surprises behind him.

Meanwhile Paul Ashcroft worked. The cash in the safe mounted up and each transaction was carefully noted on a slip of paper also locked away with the money.

After a month the slip of paper made interesting reading.

Busoni	15,000 francs
Lepâtre	25,000 francs
Sturgess	35,000 francs
Bloire	5,000 francs
Brunot	25,000 francs

Mrs. Sturgess was an American holidaying in Europe without her husband and regarded the whole thing as a high adventure. Paul had the greatest difficulty in persuading her that she could not accompany him to interview Gringo. Bloire was a disappointment. She was Swiss, stubborn and tight-fisted. It took Paul two and a half hours to work the combination on her safe and then he found that half the jewelry was paste.

Only twice did Paul fail. One safe he had been unable to open and while working on the other he had been disturbed. But on the whole

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was a happy young man and he looked after his flock well, those who had been fleeced and those waiting to be fleeced. He still took Signora Busoni dancing, still invited Mesdames Lepâtre, Bloire, and Brunot to his villa and took a genuine pleasure in their company. That they had too much and he felt obliged to spend it wisely for them didn't for one moment prejudice him against them. When Mrs. Sturgess, away on her travels by now, arrived in Rome and then in Athens, she found flowers from him waiting in her hotel room.

But you can't mix love and business. Paul should have known this. But like most men he had to learn it the hard way.

He came back one afternoon after playing the part of M. Durobat, edged through the bushes to the grotto in the garden, and then slipped in and along the tunnel to the cellar. By the light of a single candle perched on top of a bin of *Montrachet '24* he stripped off his make-up and began to change back into his own clothes.

He was whistling happily but a little offkey. Life was good. Money had piled up in the old safe and M. Durobat was having the time of his life getting rid of it. He pulled on his trousers and was about to knot a tie around his neck when a voice from a shadowed archway behind him said, "There was an occasion when I said your biography was short and dull. I take it back."

Paul turned around very slowly. He knew the voice and he knew what to expect. He found himself facing Elise.

His heart went bump, but this time the noise was like a sack of wet flour hitting a muddy floor.

"Elise," he said, gulping, "you shouldn't be here."

"But naturally, *mon ami*." She was smiling but there was no comfort in the smile. "Well . . ." One little toe was tapping on the stone slab of the floor.

"Well, what?"

"Explain, *mon petit chou*. You know in France there is a very long prison sentence for pretending to be a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor."

Paul gave another gulp and found some of his confidence.

"There is no law which says a man can't give money away. Do good by stealth—it's a proverb."

"Ah, a proverb. Very interesting. Tell me more. You give away your father's money? You like to do good?"

"Naturally—and how the devil did you find out?"

"How did I find out. *Mon ami*, you need your head examined. I make fakes. I recognize them when I see them. False beards and mustaches—Pouf! An old man with a young man's eyes—Pouf! For other people it is all right. Not for me. But what is the game? For more than three weeks now the town talks about this curious M. Durobat—so good, so kind, so eccentric, so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wealthy. Thousands of francs drop from heaven on people's heads—"

"That's better than rain."

"You think? Maybe not for some people." She threw a roll of franc notes on the floor before him. "Not for me. Not for my brother. Oh, yes, I tell you one evening that I am poor because I save everything to send my brother, who one day will be a great artist, to Paris. And what happens?"

"Well, he will be a great artist. I saw some of his stuff. It's good. Better than yours. And anyway don't throw money around like that." Paul bent and picked up the roll of notes.

"Bah!" She stamped her foot. "So this kind M. Durobat comes along a few days later and buys two of my brother's worst canvases for an incredible sum—enough to send him to Paris."

"Well, he wants to go to Paris, doesn't he?"

"But not this way."

"What's wrong with this way?"

"Ah, it is for that that I wish your answer. What is wrong, eh? You think I have nothing in here but wool?" She tapped her head with one finger vigorously and at the same time bore down on him. "Explain, you little half-English half-French pig!"

"Now, now, Elise, calm down. It's my money. I can do what I like with it. And you shouldn't have followed me, spied on me. Why it's—it's not right!"

But Elise was not to be put off. She grabbed him by the ears and with her face a few inches from his, she looked him straight in the eyes.

"Tell me, *cochon*—is it your money to give away or not?"

"But Elise—"

"Tell me!" For a second or two his head was shaken vigorously and her face danced before his eyes. "Your money or not?"

"Well . . ."

"The truth—and remember the jeweler in town is a friend of mine and we chat often. I find it difficult to understand why a rich English monsieur should need to pawn things belonging to his friend the Count of Auxier."

"But they're out of pawn now. Back in the house."

"So it is *not* your money!"

For a moment there was silence between them. When she was angry, Paul was thinking, she looked lovelier than ever, and there was a quality about her that filled him with inexpressible longing. He sighed.

"No, Elise. It isn't my money. I can't lie to you—"

"You would if you could. *Bon!* Now sit down and tell me all about it."

She pushed him, making him sit down on a case of *Pol Roger, Cuvée de Reserve, 1943,* and stood threateningly over him. She needed only a tricolor hat and a scythe blade on a pole to look like the spirit of the French Revolution.

Paul loved her more than ever,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and wondered whether to tell her the truth or invent some fiction that might not entirely blacken him. He told her the truth—much to his surprise. This was love.

She listened to him without interruption except for occasional and obscure monosyllabic French expressions of angry surprise. When he had finished she said forcibly, "It is shameful—to make love to silly old women and then steal their money!"

"I don't make love to them."

"Who is to know that?"

"And anyway, they don't miss their money and I do a lot of good with it. And anyway again, I don't see what you have to bellyache about—"

"Don't use such terms to me, *cochon!*"

"Why complain, then? Why should *you* complain? You're just as dishonest with your fake antiques." He grinned, and in a high falsetto said, "One of the fishermen dragged it up in his net . . ."

"It's such a little thing—"

"Doesn't matter."

"And the American have too much money."

"No excuse. Dishonesty is dishonesty, small or big. It's the principle that counts, Elise."

"Don't lecture me." She was silent for a moment and one wonderful eyebrow went up cocked in thought. Then she asked, "How much money have you got left in that safe?"

"I don't know. More than one hundred thousand francs."

"Then you must get rid of it. At once."

"I must?"

"Yes. Give it to Sister Thérèse. You can't give it back to the people you took it from. It'll be enough to build the new bathrooms and the kitchens—"

"You know about that?"

Elise rolled her eyes at his naivety. "The whole town knows. Sister Thérèse talks of nothing else but the clever way she is handling this mysterious M. Durobat. In the *Dauphin Vert* they are laying bets that she will get the money before the month is out. She will, too. Tomorrow."

"If you say so," said Paul meekly. "And then how soon after that will you be ready to leave?"

"Leave?" Elise's eyes widened, dark and puzzled.

"But of course. That's what you mean, isn't it? Oh, Elise, you make me very happy." Paul stood up and took her hand. "I've been waiting for this moment so long. We'll go to Paris—and later we'll send for your brother."

Elise stepped back from him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"But of course you do. It's obvious." Paul put out his hands and took her shoulders lovingly. "You get angry because you think I make love to these old women. You take the trouble to find out all about me and when you know the truth,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what do you do? Go to the police like a good citizen? No, you come to me. You couldn't say more clearly that you love me. Darling," he bent forward and kissed her on the cheek. "Do we get married here or in Paris?"

"You're crazy!" Her voice made a faint echo in the cobwebbed arches.

"I know, with love."

"But I don't—"

"But you do."

Paul put his arms around her and drew her to him. She came like a hypnotized bird. Then his lips were on hers and there was a roll of sound in his ears as though he had a hundred drums beating instead of a single heart.

Then suddenly the bird was no longer hypnotized and there was warmth and movement in the soft lips under his own.

Then suddenly she drew away from him, gave a little gasp, and with her face radiant, she whispered huskily, "*Ma foi* . . . it is true. I am crazy. I am in love." And then reaching for him, moving swiftly into his arms, she sighed, "Now let us do it again. Now that I know what it is all about and can give my mind to it."

"*Chéri* . . ." Sigh.

"*Chérie* . . ." Sigh, cut short.

And then much later, sitting side by side on a case of champagne, Elise said with a sigh of content, "In Paris we shall be so happy."

"Of course. We will open an antique shop. Your fakes will go well, and I should meet many rich people—"

"No, nothing like that. We will work hard—and honestly."

"You mean that?" Surprise filled Paul's voice. "Not even an occasional—"

"No." And it was the "No" of a woman shaping a man's future.

"But why? Hard work is so dull."

"It is respectable. What child could respect a parent who was not honest?"

"What child is this?"

"Our children. They must be proud of their papa and mama—"

"Children!" Paul's voice echoed weakly around the cellar.

"Yes. Five. Three boys and two girls. I have it all planned. An honest, respectable family. That is marriage. You agree?" There was loving threat in the last two words.

Paul sighed. "I agree."

Elise smiled contentedly and put her arms around his neck.

"*Chéri*—I am glad you insist."

"*Chérie* . . ."

And so it was arranged later, over a bottle of *Pommery*, taken on the terrace with the sea like mauve velvet and the sky full of polished stars and a swollen moon, that the next morning Paul should give all the money to Sister Thérèse and that a new life should start for them both. It would be hard at first, they both knew, for dishonesty, small or big, is a habit hard to break. But they were young and they were in love—two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

things which add up to optimism; and what is there that can stand against optimism?

They sat, hand in hand on the terrace, undisturbed because Mme. Fouret had gone into town to visit her sister.

The next morning, while Paul was having his breakfast, Mme. Fouret came to him and, after a certain amount of skirmishing, said, "Monsieur, my sister goes to Aix-les-bains today and I was wondering . . ."

Paul nodded. "But, of course. You must go with her on the journey to look after her, and also perhaps you should stay a few days to see her settled in?"

"Ha, monsieur, you are so understanding and so kind."

"Not at all, Mme. Fouret. Tell the chauffeur to run you into town as soon as you are ready."

And when she came back from Aix-les-bains, thought Paul, he would be gone. But he would leave a present for her. It was the best way to say goodbye.

Mme. Fouret left about ten o'clock. Paul had a swim and then before changing he went to the old safe, which was in one corner of the villa's billiard room, and opened it.

There was more than one hundred thousand francs in it . . . more than seven thousand pounds . . . One hundred thousand francs would be a fine present for Sister Thérèse, and the surplus would allow him to tip his servants, buy a few presents, and still have enough to take him to Paris. Elise, he felt, would understand that a man was entitled to dishonest traveling expenses when he journeyed to an honest living.

He locked the money back in the safe and put the key in the pocket of his beach robe. This afternoon he would change into his M. Durobat disguise and go to see Sister Thérèse. It was going to be a red letter day for her.

As a matter of fact, it was going to be quite a day for Paul, though he was blissfully unaware of it as he picked up a cue and began to knock the balls about the billiard table.

He was just about to play a difficult cannon shot and screw his own ball back off the top cushion into the bottom lefthand pocket when a shadow fell across the table.

Paul looked up. The billard room had a long run of wide windows facing out over the garden with a glimpse of the sea showing between two acacia trees, and in the center of the windows was an open doorway. Standing just inside the doorway was a curious trio.

In front, leaning forward with his large, fat, ring-heavy hands resting on the top of a gold-headed cane was a man with the stature and heavy-jowled face of a Napoleon. He wore a dove-gray suit, a black stock with a pearl-headed pin, lilac spats, and a flat-crowned felt hat with the brim turned up. The hat was tipped forward, giving the impression that it rested on his eyebrows, which were strong and bushy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a certain cowlike amiability about the large face which was strengthened by a gentle cud-chewing action of his mouth.

On his right was a tall, solemn-faced individual in a tight navy-blue suit, the jacket open to show an even tighter blue-and-white horizontally striped fisherman's vest. He wore a white cloth cap and a frown, both of them the worse for wear.

The other person, on the left, was a youth of about seventeen with a pink-and-white handsome face, a vacant smile, brown eyes full of wonder, and an open mouth. He wore an open leather jerkin with a mermaid painted on each arm, a blue silk shirt, red canvas trousers, and white shoes.

"Monsieur Ashcroft?" inquired the man in the dove-gray suit, and his voice was as rich as bouillabaisse.

"Yes." Paul put his cue down. "Who are you and what do you want?"

The man smiled and there was a flash of three gold teeth. He handed his cane to the youth and then picked up the cue Paul had just put down. He leaned over the table, and as he prepared for a shot, he said, "A good question and well put. Shows a keen, direct mind. I like it. One must be a bit of a psychologist these days to succeed. Must be able to mark a man down at once—particularly in business. Yes . . ."

He played the shot and the ball screwed back off the cushion into the bottom left-hand pocket. "Sweet," he sighed, and straightened up.

"I think," said Paul cautiously, "you'd better explain yourself a little more clearly."

"Naturally—but it takes time. The use of words is involved. Oh, yes . . . and psychology. Must assess a man before you know which screw to put on him." He set the balls up for another shot.

"Interesting," said Paul. "But if you don't mind, I'll call the gardener and chauffeur and have you thrown out."

"Countermeasure. Violence. But ineffective. I'll explain why later, but I'm glad you brought it up because it's good for the boy—experience." He tipped his head over his shoulder toward the youth in the jerkin and said, "My articled pupil. Not good material but in time we'll make something out of him. Close your mouth, André," he said gently, and then played his shot.

"I could, of course, telephone for the police," said Paul.

"You could." The gold teeth flashed again and the rings of one hand winked as he chalked the top of the cue.

"Unwise," said the tall thin man in the navy-blue suit, and his voice had the resonance of a slide of wet gravel.

"My secretary," said the man in the dove-gray suit proudly. "Accounts and legal department. M. Plume—but no dress sense." he bent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forward, cocked his head as he looked along the line of his shot and said vaguely, "It's a big old-fashioned safe. How much have you got in it?"

"Look, what the hell do you think —" Paul made a hasty forward movement, but then he stopped abruptly.

Monsieur Plume and André were staring down at their right hands and the surprise on their faces matched that on Paul's. Each hand held a revolver.

"Sweet," said the man in the dove-gray suit. "But André, hold it a little higher and remember what I told you. You must have the safety catch off. That's better." He turned his head back and played his shot, potting a ball with a neat brisk stroke. "How much in the safe?" he asked, straightening up.

Paul, although no sailor, had enough sense not to row against tide and wind.

"Nothing," he said, setting an oblique course.

"Try again."

And somehow M. Plume and André had moved forward and were crowding Paul a little, and André's vacant grin had become a doglike pant.

"Just over one hundred thousand francs," Paul confessed. "And in my opinion the explanations are taking far too long."

"The preliminaries," said M. Dove-Gray, "must be observed. Opportunity for studying character on both sides."

He moved away from the table and sinking into a large wicker chair, carefully adjusted the crease of his trousers, then took a cigar from a case. André stretched out his left hand and held a lighter for him. "Thank you, André. And now, M. Ashcroft, the key please."

"I haven't got the key. I've lost it. I've thrown it into the sea. It's with my lawyers. Take your choice. And anyway, it's not my money."

"Good, good," said the man amiably. "You notice that, André? Bluster, smokescreen—but not from nervousness or fear. Gives him time to think; time to plan. Well, André, you know the answer to that. Cut right through it. After all, we know where the key is, don't we. Remember we were looking through the window a little while ago."

As he spoke, M. Plume and André, eager and swift, closed in on Paul. A revolver dug in his back and another in the stomach. He coughed at the concerted pressures and André's hand relieved him of the key in the pocket of his beach robe.

"Sweet," said their master. "Sweet. End of preliminaries. Now to business, No. no, André—" he said sharply as the youth made a move toward the safe. "Not that at all. That's crude, unprofessional and above all, unethical."

Then, from behind a dove-gray cloud of cigar smoke, he said benignly to Paul, "I'm surprised, monsieur, that you don't know me. We did meet many years ago—and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

since then—though I take no offense—you have gone on exaggerating our acquaintance." He stood up and gave a plump little bow. "I am Kyro Chrysantos—"

"As far as I'm concerned you can be Father Christmas!" said Paul angrily.

"No, no, you don't understand yet. Kyro Chrysantos. Or to you, monsieur, Gringo the Greek. Ha, you look surprised."

Paul was surprised. He sat down suddenly in the chair behind him. As he did so, a change came over the company. The air of enigma and threat evaporated and an easy sense of camaraderie blossomed.

M. Plume gave Paul a cigarette and André lit it for him and M. Chrysantos said with a gentle wave of his cigar, "It is a nice place you have appropriated here and believe me, monsieur, I am full of admiration for you. You do us all credit. Ah, André, if I could only hope that one day you would be as successful as monsieur here."

"Tell me," said Paul, recovering and by no means resigned to drifting for long helpless before wind and tide, "how did you learn about me? I thought you were dead or on Devil's Island?"

"Both those pleasures, M. Paul, are happily remote. Notice now, André, this is the period of consolidation—the *va-et-vient* of cross-talk before moving into the last stage which is, of course, amicable settlement—"

"Look," said Paul, "couldn't you cut out the lectures? Let him do it by correspondence course or something. How did you find out?"

"But he is young, monsieur. You and I were young once and we had to learn. Besides his father has paid me a large premium. This is a morning André will never forget."

"Or me," said Paul.

"Or me," said M. Plume.

"Or me," said Chrysantos. "So, we are all happy. Yes, we are happy. And now I tell you. Sometime ago a lady, an American lady called Sturgess, is spending a few days in Marseilles and in every bar she is asking for Gringo the Greek. She wants to meet him. And this comes to my ears, so I oblige her—"

"Oh, lord!"

"It is all right, monsieur. I listened to her and I did not give you away. It seems that I stole her jewels and you bought them back from me. It is good. I take her on a tour of the underworld. She is fun. I make a little money from her. I give her my autograph and she goes away happy. And after that I decide to come here and find M. Ashcroft. For two weeks now, monsieur, we have been in the town watching you. And now we are here, and the partnership is complete. But one hundred thousand francs is not much. I should have thought you would have had more than that."

"I have had heavy expenses, and besides, I'm an extravagant spender."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who is not? But to split this among four—yea, it is very little. Seventy-five thousand between you and me and twenty-five thousand for my friends . . . No, it is not enough."

"Oh, you mean to let me keep some? That's very generous."

"But of course. You have made it—by using my name. So we share. But it is too little considering your talent and the value of my name. Notice, André, that little money is for little men. Big money, big men—and big risks, of course. Close your mouth, André. Good. Now, monsieur, I have a proposition to make to which you will agree. Notice, André, the use of the little word *will*—it establishes authority."

Paul sat there, certain that he could not let these men steal the money. Elise would give him hell if he did. The money was to go to Sister Thérèse—all of it.

"And the proposition?" asked Paul.

"The one hundred thousand in the safe is yours. But for the time being I keep the key. I shall give you the key when we have made another one hundred thousand for me."

"And how are we to make it?"

"We do it quickly in one go. In fact, we begin today. In this town, monsieur, you may not know, but there is a very rich old man who gives his money away. M. Durobat, he is called. You have heard of him?"

"I have," said Paul faintly.

"Each afternoon he comes to the town. This afternoon we kidnap him, bring him here—and he pays a ransom of one hundred thousand francs." Chrysantos beamed happily at Paul. "Observe, André, I am concise when it comes to the plan. Sharp, direct, no beating about the mulberry tree."

Then to Paul, he said, "What do you say, monsieur? Ah, I see you are overcome by the brilliance of my plan."

Paul stood up. "What do I think? I think that at this moment we all need a drink."

"Excellent!" cried Chrysantos. "Notice, André—the moment of accord. The bargain to be sealed with this hospitable offer of refreshment. So civilized. Later, we shall choose our bedrooms and make ourselves comfortable here."

Paul smiled bleakly. "For the moment let's have a drink." He was moving to do something about it when a voice from the open doorway said, "Don't bother, Paul, *cheri*, I'll get them." Elise was standing there. "I came back with your chauffeur whom I met in town."

Chrysantos was on his feet and bowing, André gaped a little more, and M. Plume frowned and blinked. Their reactions were reasonable—the tribute of those who look on loveliness. She stood there beautiful and composed, in a gold dress, her dark hair shining, her scarlet lips like soft petals, and her eyes on Paul.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You heard?" said Paul.

"Everything," said Elise. "I think it is a wonderful idea. Brilliant." She smiled at Chrysantos.

"Who is this?" asked Chrysantos admiringly. His heart was melting like candle wax.

"She's . . . she's—"

"I'm his accomplice," said Elise easily. "We always work together." And then as she came into the room and walked entrancingly toward the sidetable that held the drinks, she went on, "Remember, André—if you work a high-class racket, you must have a high-class accomplice."

"Charming," said Chrysantos, ravished. "Charming. Oh, happy André . . . what a morning, what an experience for you, for us all!" He bounded forward like a rubber ball to help Elise, while Paul said weakly, "Make mine a large dry Martini . . ."

It certainly was an experience. Paul could not deny that. He had to kidnap himself and find a one-hundred-thousand-franc ransom. A wild ghost chase.

"It's difficult," he said to Elise. They were walking in the garden before lunch. Gringo and his two henchmen were in the billiard room playing snooker. They weren't concerned with keeping an eye on Paul. If he liked to run out on them he was welcome. The one hundred thousand francs in the safe would go to them.

"But not impossible," said Elise firmly. "That money in the safe is going to the orphanage—and then we're going to Paris and raise a family."

"But how can I kidnap myself?"

"You won't. I shall kidnap you—with the help of Gringo. We'll bring you back here blindfolded and put you in the cellar. Then you can change back into your proper clothes, slip out through the grotto and into the house."

"But at any moment Gringo may go down to the cellar. There won't be anyone there. He'll expect the old man to eat . . . and then there will be the ransom arrangements to make."

"Of course, but I shall do all that. The first principle in kidnaping is to keep the contacts with the kidnaped as few as possible. Gringo will see that—"

"It'll be a wonderful object lesson for André, too. All right, they never know that the cellar is empty. But what about the one hundred thousand?"

"We shall have to think about that. Let's get the old man safely in the cellar first."

"You're wonderful. Anyone would think you'd been kidnaping people all your life."

And Paul went on thinking she was wonderful. Halfway through a lunch, pleasantly punctuated by Gringo's tips on etiquette to André ("A bad mannered crook, André, can only operate in a working-class milieu. The big money is in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finger-bowl and one-napkin-a-meal set"), Elise took charge and not even Gringo had any criticism to make.

Late every afternoon before leaving the town M. Durobat was in the habit of taking an aperitif at the *Dauphin Vert.* Elise was to get into conversation with him there and then offer to drive him home. They would go off in the car and just outside the town Gringo, hidden in the back, would reveal himself and blindfold the old man.

Then the old man would be brought to the villa and marched down to the cellar. After that only Elise would have contact with him. While all this was going on, Paul and M. Plume and André would establish sound alibis. Paul would go off to tea with Signora Busoni and the other two spend the afternoon bathing on the beach at the little cove.

"Perfect," said Gringo, beaming at Elise. Then to Paul, he declared, "You are lucky to have such a partner. Brains *and* beauty. Note that, André, it's a formidable combination."

Paul nodded. "She took a lot of training, though. When she first came to me she was raw and gauche —no dress sense, no *savoir faire*—"

He broke off with a wince as Elise kicked him under the table.

"So?" mused Gringo. "We must compare our training methods sometime."

"Money," said M. Plume hollowly. "How do we get the money out of the old gaga?"

"Later," said Gringo. "We fix that when he is in the cellar."

"He must have a bed in the cellar. Every comfort," said Elise. "I shall need help fixing the place up."

"We shall do it together," said Gringo, and the trio of gold teeth flashed as he smiled gallantly at her.

The kidnaping went like a dream.

"Sweet . . ."

Gringo kept saying it to himself as he and Elise drove home.

M. Durobat alongside her was blindfolded and dignified. Gringo kept his revolver pressed between the old man's shoulder blades and couldn't control a conversational urge.

"You are immensely wealthy, monsieur, I believe?"

"Immoderately so, yes."

"You understand what is happening to you?"

"But of course."

"We put your value at one hundred thousand francs—a mere bagatelle for you."

"You won't get a *sou* out of me."

"We shall see."

That evening—with a phantom M. Durobat locked up in the cellar —the party at the villa was quite gay. In fact, Gringo and his two friends were more than a little gay. Champagne and the prospect of easy money had gone to their heads.

Gringo, entirely captivated by Elise, pursued her with elephantine gallantries and it was while he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watched this exhibition that an idea came to Paul. Later he got Elise alone in the garden.

"You've made quite a hit with Gringo."

"That's true. He's already suggesting that if I get tired of working for you he would be delighted to give me a job."

"I'll knock his head off."

He put arms around her and kissed her.

Elise sighed. He kissed her again.

Then he said, "I've an idea how we can get that money out of the safe and give these people the slip. But it depends on you."

"Tell me."

Paul did, and the next morning a period of stalemate began so far as M. Durobat was concerned.

Elise coming up from the cellar after taking the old man breakfast reported to the party that he refused to say where he lived and he refused to countenance any question of paying them money.

"He says he's quite happy to spend the rest of his life in the cellar."

"I don't blame him," said Paul. "There's enough drink there to last a lifetime."

"Obstinate," said M. Plume.

"Maybe, Gringo, I should twist his arm a little," suggested André.

"No, André. He is old and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. We are not monsters—yet. No, no, we shall starve him a little to begin with. He is used to eating well."

So they starved M. Durobat for a day and a half and at the end of that time Elise reported, "He says he can live on his fat for another week. He is quite happy with champagne and brandy."

"We must remove the drink," said M. Plume.

"Impossible," said Paul. "It would take two days to do it and Elise couldn't do it alone. That means he would see us and be able to recognize us later."

"Quite right," said Gringo. "Remember, André, anonymity is the foundation of all kidnaping. For mademoiselle here, it is different. A beautiful face is harder to trace than an ugly one. She dyes her hair red, changes her lipstick, and goes to Italy for a couple of months. No, here we are up against the courage of a true Frenchman."

"I twist his arm, maybe," suggested André.

Gringo shook his head. "Always with you, André, it is too much or too little. What is a twist of the arm at this stage? A mosquito bite. No, mademoiselle, you tell him that if tomorrow he does not cooperate we shall cut off one of his ears."

"Who's going to cut it off?" asked Paul.

Gringo smiled. "Why, André, of course. It will mark the end of his apprenticeship. Just think, André —" he patted the youth on the shoulder "—your first ear."

André looked a little pale, gulped, and said, "The left or the right?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The right," said Gringo.

But the next morning Elise reported, "He says that it is of no consequence. He is beyond the age where his looks are important. But he insists that you use a sharp knife."

"A man of spirit," said Gringo admiringly. "André, you had better spend the morning sharpening your knife. Maybe when he sees we mean business he will change his mind."

André gulped and said, "Maybe it is too great an honor for me. Maybe, Gringo, I am not sufficiently experienced yet—"

"Nonsense, André. Every man is a little nervous until the moment comes—"

"Sure," said Paul, "I remember my first ear. I had rats in the tummy until I started—and then everything was all right."

"It doesn't bleed—not so much as you imagine," said M. Plume hollowly.

"Of course not," said Gringo stoutly. "And after that, M. Plume shall have the left ear, if necessary."

Elise gave Gringo a warm, admiring smile. "You are a man of iron—it is good to work with someone of such strength of character. Ruthlessness in a man stirs a woman."

"Mademoiselle," Gringo gave a little bow, "beneath the iron is a core of softness, a heart full of tenderness." He took her hand and kissed it.

Ten minutes later, as Elise strolled by herself on the terrace above the sea, Gringo came out to her. He presented her with a rose and kissed her hand again.

"Sweet . . ." he said. "The morning is beautiful, the bright flowers, the blue sea and you, mademoiselle, like a jewel amidst them all. In you I recognize the woman I have been looking for all my life."

"And now you have found me?" She glanced at him coquettishly.

Gringo rolled his eyes in delight. "Poor André, poor Plume, and poor Paul—such subtlety is beyond them. You and I, Mlle. Elise, operate on a higher plane. We understand one another without words."

"Let's use words for a while, anyway . . . Kyro."

Gringo sighed like a leaky boiler. "Kyro . . . Elise . . . two notes of music."

"Words," said Elise. "Not music."

Gringo came back to earth and said shrewdly, "What is your proposition?"

"Meaning?"

"That no man, no matter what his age, wants his ear cut off. The left or the right. M. Durobat, I am sure was in a reasonable frame of mind. You were a long time with him and when you appeared you had a tiny smile in the corner of your lips. It is there still. Your proposition, Elise."

"You are very clever, Kyro," said Elise.

"And you are very beautiful, Elise. Tell me what you plan."

"It might be a little dishonest."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Admirable."

"And involve betraying your friends."

"Excellent."

"Paul will be heartbroken."

"He will get over it."

"We should have to become equal partners."

"Sweet . . . It is my ambition. Explain."

"You have the key of the safe?"

"Of course." He patted a pocket.

"You would be waiting by the little cove in an hour with one hundred thousand francs?"

"Nothing easier. I see a whole new life opening before me."

"Us."

"A thousand apologies. Us."

"I have a check . . ." For a moment Elise's hand slipped inside the front of her blouse and a piece of paper was waved like the flight of a large blue butterfly in front of Gringo's nose. ". . . for one hundred thousand francs, drawn by M. Durobat on a Marseilles bank. We could have cashed it before midday."

"Charming! Superb! I see a golden future for us." Gringo stretched out his arms for her, but Elise slipped aside gently.

"Let us not rush the preliminaries, Kyro. Our feet must first be firmly on the pathway to the golden future. In an hour at the little cove. *Entendu?*"

"I shall be there." He beamed at her. "Ah, what an object lesson this will be to André never to trust anyone. His father is certainly getting his money's worth."

A few moments later Elise entered Paul's bedroom.

She said triumphantly, "It worked."

"Good," said Paul, and then with a frown asked, "Did he kiss you?"

Elise smiled. "Would it matter?"

"Of course. I've noticed a tendency in you always to overplay a part."

"*Petit cochon* . . . I like you to be jealous. But enough. In one hour. You must now get into your M. Durobat clothes. The moment we get rid of Gringo we drive to the convent and give Sister Thérèse the money—"

"And then heigh-ho for Paris!" Paul suddenly grabbed her by the waist and swung her around. "You know," he said as he kissed her and set her down, "I've a feeling that we should open an antique shop in Paris. Those little Hermes figures of yours would go very well, and maybe—"

Elise put her hand on his mouth. "In Paris we work and live honestly."

"Sure," said Paul. "We get our feet firmly on the golden pathway to an honest future." He grinned.

"Ah, so—you were watching and listening from the window. *Ma foi.* I can see that I shall have a jealous husband."

"Jealous of every hair on your head, every word you say to another." He kissed her again. "You're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wonderful. What an object lesson you will be to André—and Gringo—never to trust a woman . . ."

There was no trouble at all. Gringo, a symphony in dove-gray, was waiting at the roadside by the cove. Elise drew up in Paul's car and he got in alongside her.

"You have the money?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Show."

Gringo chuckled. "A woman after my own heart. What poise, what lack of trust, what perfect understanding . . . We shall travel far."

He pulled a thick packet of banknotes from his inside coat.

"You've got it wrong," said Paul, rising from under a dust sheet in the back of the car. "You're not traveling any distance."

Gringo half turned, saw M. Durobat towering above him, and then a rubber blackjack hit him behind the ear and the subsequent proceedings no longer interested him.

"You know," said Paul as he and Elise lifted Gringo out and deposited him beneath a clump of pines, "I've never used one of those things before. They really work. I suppose I haven't killed him?"

Gringo groaned and above the wash of the sea they heard him, deep in coma, say, "Sweet . . ."

"Count the money," said Elise as they got back into the car and began to drive off. It was all there.

But when they got to the orphanage they couldn't find Sister Thérèse. In fact, they couldn't find anyone but the lodge-keeper and he told them that the whole orphanage had gone off that morning for its annual outing to a small town in the hills about twenty miles inland.

"Of course," said Paul to Elise as they left the place. "I should have remembered. I gave Sister Thérèse a donation for the outing a week ago. Well, there's nothing to do but drive up there. It's on the way to Paris—"

"But what about all my things?"

"Your brother can bring them later. We can't hang about this town. Just think what will happen when Gringo recovers."

He started the car and began to drive out of town. As he went he sang happily and Elise drew close to him and contemplated blissfully the years that lay ahead of her, listening to his tuneless singing.

They couldn't know it, of course, but the trouble was not to come from Gringo. It was to come from a quite different quarter.

Half an hour after they had left the villa, Mme. Fouret arrived in a taxi from the station. She had left her sister comfortably installed at Aix-les-bains. She found André and M. Plume playing billiards and at once light warfare broke out between them. She refused to believe that such types could be guests of M. Paul. And M. Paul couldn't be found.

"We're working with him," said André, conscious of unwanted re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sponsibility and trying to remember all his lessons. "But I don't see where you figure."

"Maybe she's his mother," said M. Plume.

But before the scene could really develop and put André right out of his depths there was an interruption. A short, dapper, elderly figure in a white suit and a bad temper came bouncing into the room.

"Mme. Fouret!" he shouted. "What the devil goes on here? Strange servants, a man staggering about my drive, who looks as though he's drunk and says he's a guest here—and these." He glared at André and M. Plume through his monocle.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Mme. Fouret faintly.

And it was—Comte d'Auxier unexpectedly back from America and already confusedly aware that things were not right.

M. Plume, taking over Gringo's role manfully, said, "André, when a situation is confused and trouble brews, retire from it."

They both slipped out while the Count was still bellowing and dancing round the room. Half an hour later the situation was less confused. The police in town were seeking M. Paul Ashcroft, impostor, and already the information had come to hand that M. Ashcroft's car had been seen heading out of town on the Paris road. A police car was soon following it. And following the police car was Comte d'Auxier with Mme. Fouret.

"This man," fumed the Count, "he uses my house, he sleeps in my bed, he drinks my drink—"

"Oh, no, monsieur. He ordered his own—"

"He's a rogue!"

"He had such nice manners—and so English."

"Never trust the English!" the Count stormed.

And ahead of them the police radio car, with a couple of motorcyclists preceding it, was picking up messages from headquarters as the progress of Paul's car was relayed to it.

And away ahead of them all, Paul and Elise were just driving into the little town of Col-des-Pins with its pine trees and its waterfalls, its grotto and the cool tree-shaded pleasure gardens where the orphans under the care of Sister Thérèse were filling the resin-scented air with happy shouts.

To make the day a superlatively happy one for Sister Thérèse she suddenly looked up and saw M. Durobat coming across the pine needles toward her. He was smiling and waving his silver-headed cane to some of the children who had recognized him.

"They are always so glad to see you, monsieur," said Sister Thérèse.

"Sister," Monsieur Durobat raised his hat, gave her a little bow, and then handing a small brown paper packet to her, said, "I am on my way back to Paris. But before I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leave . . . Well, Sister, there is no need for a long speech. . . ."

And there wasn't because Sister Thérèse, the packet in her hand, was well able to recognize the crisp crackle that came from it.

"For the baths and the kitchens, Sister, and for the children."

"Ah, monsieur—"

"Not a word more."

M. Durobat bowed again and then was moving away through the pines. Sister Thérèse opened the packet and with shaking fingers began to count the banknotes . . .

Back in the car Elise said to Paul, "And now?"

"Into the town. There is a little hotel in the main square. I shall change there and then we will be on our way. This is goodbye to M. Durobat."

"After a time you will not miss him, I promise," said Elise.

Paul gave her a smile and squeezed her hand.

It was a wide cool square, lined with acacia trees and surrounded by pink and white buildings, a couple of cafés, a barber's shop, a urinoir, and the Hotel des Pins. In the center of the square was a large fountain, and a statue of some obscure French politician on which pigeons roosted.

Paul parked the car outside the hotel. Leaving Elise he took his suitcase from the trunk compartment and went into the hotel.

He booked a room with a bath and a few minutes later was happily peeling off the beard and disguise of M. Durobat. In a little while he would walk out into the cool square, Paul Ashcroft for good, ready to face the world with Elise on his arm. With a girl like Elise it shouldn't be hard to live almost as honestly as any other man. Anyway, a price had to be paid for happiness—and a family, apparently.

Down below, Elise, bored with sitting in the car, got out and strolled across the square. On the far side was a little wooden gateway and a path through some pines. At the side of the gate was a notice extolling the beauties of a natural grotto. Some cyclists came racing up to the gate as she stood there. They propped their bicycles together, and chattering like a flock of starlings, swept through the gate in a flurry of long bare legs and brief shorts.

She began to stroll back across the square. She was happy. Not simply because she was in love and going to be married. One needed more than that. She had a man who needed changing. She would make a new man of Paul—an honest man. It was the kind of work every woman relished. He needed a firm hand. She had one. She had two. Long, shapely, pretty hands—but firm.

And then the cool peaceful square suddenly erupted. One minute the dogs were sleeping happily in the sunshine by the fountain and a few people were lazily sipping drinks under the red and yellow and green

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and blue awnings, and the next—a volcano, a noisy, colorful turmoil.

A police car came sweeping into the square. Motorcycles were roaring. Another car appeared, its horn blowing furiously to clear a growing crowd.

And all at once there were shouts, cries, arms waving in the air, children running, shopkeepers at their doors, and the pigeons going up from the statue in a great *clack clack* of wings.

And the vortex of it all was Paul's car outside the hotel.

A policeman shouted, "*Où est-il? Ce monsieur anglais?*"

"His car! His car!" From Mme. Fouret.

"He slept in my bed! The scoundrel! Arrest him!" From the Count.

"Impossible, monsieur le Comte, until we find him," from the police.

"What is it?"

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*"

"Who is it?"

"He is English. A crook."

"Ah, the English. Vive la France!"

"Where is he?"

The question was answered by Mme. Fouret.

"There he is!" she cried and pointed to the top of the steps running up to the hotel door. And the moment she had shouted she regretted it, for at heart she was very fond of Paul. But it was too late.

Paul stood at the top of the steps. He wore a straw boater, a neat gray suit, and a bow tie as bright as a tropical butterfly. One hand rested lightly on the silver head of a walking stick. He was whistling gently. The day was fine, the sky was blue—and Life, he was thinking, was good.

The thought lasted exactly three seconds.

A crowd of people rushed up the steps toward him, a crowd headed by three policemen, the Count, and Mme. Fouret, and followed by a fine old ragtag and bobtail of law-abiding citizens determined to miss no fun, though they were far from clear what it was all about.

"*Assassin!*"

"*Voleur!*"

"Perfidious Englishman!"

"*Monstre!*"

And somewhere faint in the roar the chirp of a young girl who sold souvenirs in the gift shop by the grotto, "But he is charming . . ."

Paul saw Mme. Fouret and the Count and (recalling a photograph of the Count he had seen in the villa) his mind signaled, "All is discovered." He began to run to the left along the terrace that fronted the hotel.

And from the middle of the square, helpless, Elise watched him go. She had found love, she thought with anguish, only to see it torn to pieces before her eyes by an angry crowd.

She started after the crowd, her dark eyes blazing, and picking up Paul's stick which he had dropped she knew that unless a miracle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happened she was going to be arrested for striking a policeman. However . . . maybe they would let her and Paul share the same cell.

But Paul, heavy though the odds were against him, had no intention of going to prison. He vaulted over the end of the terrace into the square and slipped through pavement tables and into a cafe. As he went through, the proprietress screamed at him. Going out of the rear door he heard the crowd crash into the place like a tidal wave.

He ran down the back of some houses, chose a door, and found himself racing through a barber shop to the square again. He had a quick glimpse of a half-lathered face, saw a razor brandished, heard a cry of "Marthe, check the till. We've been robbed!" and he was out into the square.

Behind him there was another roar and then the sound of glass breaking and chairs being overturned. He headed across the square knowing that it was no good to take to open country. He had to find a place to hide. Otherwise, no Elise, no Paris, no family . . .

He slipped through the gift shop, raced along the side of a stream, swung left down an alley, ducked between the cars in a garage, and came out opposite the urinoir. And wherever he went the crowd thundered after him, not gaining but not losing on him, and spreading destruction and chaos in its wake. Within ten minutes Paul was hot and almost breathless, and one third of the buildings around the square had suffered.

Then, as Paul came charging around the corner of a little church, he saw Sister Thérèse, indifferent to all the noise and disturbance, walking calmly up the steps of the hotel. In that moment the obvious idea for salvation came to him.

He headed across the square, gained ten yards on his nearest pursuer, and was up the steps like a bounding gazelle

He flashed by Sister Thérèse in the hall and went up the stairs three at a time. As he turned into the corridor where his room was, he heard the crowd surge into the hotel below like a noisy riptide, and he felt the thunder of feet send a vast tremble through the building.

By the time he reached the door of his room he was already undressing, one hand ripping off his bow tie, the other sending his boater skimming through the window at the far end of the passage.

In his room he slammed and locked the door behind him and jumped for M. Durobat's clothes and make-up which he had left there. Paul had made quick changes before but never one as quick as this. At the end of most of his operations he had been forced to change quickly and move on, but this time —Nemesis was even closer on his heels.

He could hear the yelling of voices and the slamming of doors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the search swept through the floor below his, and then as he fixed his beard and tidied his black cravat and kicked his own clothes under the bed he heard the thud of feet on the stairway.

He went to the door and stepped out. The tide swept down on him, led by the Count and a policeman. The Count skidded to a stop before Paul and cried, "Monsieur, you have seen a young Englishman up here?"

"An Englishman?"

"Yes—a thief, an impostor—"

"He wears a bow tie and a straw hat, monsieur!" panted the policeman.

"Ha . . ." Paul's eyes brightened. "That is the young man. He came charging through my room, messieurs, like a veritable holocaust—no, I mean whirlwind—and out on to the balcony. I was coming to complain. After all I am an old man and have come here for some peace, some rest—"

But he was talking to himself. The crowd was roaring by him into the room. M. Durobat turned and went quietly to the head of the stairs.

He went down them slowly and in the hall he met Sister Thérèse on her way out. She greeted him with a warm smile.

"I have just telephoned my convent, monsieur, to give them the good news. But tell me, monsieur, what is all that goes on here?"

"It is nothing, sister. Some local custom, no doubt."

He paused at the bottom of the steps and bowed to her.

"Goodbye, sister."

She nodded her old apple head and beamed.

"Goodbye, monsieur. But surely you are not a bicyclist at your age?"

M. Durobat chuckled. Standing at the pavement's edge was Elise between two bicycles which she had taken from outside the grotto.

"Indeed I am, sister. My heart is young, and each day I take bicycling exercises with my niece here."

He took a bicycle, gave a little run, and hopped into the saddle. Elise followed him and the two began to pedal across the square, their pace increasing with each moment they left the hotel farther behind.

Sister Thérèse watched them benevolently. From inside the hotel a babble of sound was still going on. From the far side of the square came the gay and curiously young whistling of M. Durobat, telling the world that it still owed him a living—and, unless he could wriggle out of it, he was going to make it honestly with the young girl at his side.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Box Score for 1963

In editing his second volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1964 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Anthony Boucher selected 17 stories as the best, and listed 100 others in his Honor Roll of 1963—a total of 117 distinguished stories of which one appeared only in book form. Here is the box score for the 116 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in American magazines during the year of 1963:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	59	50.8%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	16	13.8%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	11	9.5%
Rogue	5	4.3%
Playboy	4	3.4%
Manhunt	3	2.6%
Saturday Evening Post	3	2.6%
Cosmopolitan	2	1.7%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	2	1.7%
Monocle	2	1.7%
New Yorker	2	1.7%
This Week	2	1.7%
Argosy	1	.9%
Bridge World	1	.9%
Eros	1	.9%
Fantastic	1	.9%
McCall's	1	.9%

In 1962, EQMM's percentage of Honor Roll stories of the year was 43.6%. In 1963, it was 50.8%. In other words, slightly more than one-half of all the distinguished mystery stories published last year in American magazines appeared in EQMM; and this does not include the bonus of excellent reprints, both short stories and short novels, which EQMM offers every month.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ontinued from other side)

THRILLING GARDNER STORIES...

lus 2 More New Mysteries . . . ALL for only $1.00

OU'RE "GUILTY" of missing a marvelous buy! — if you on't accept these ELEVEN great ysteries *now!* You get four top erry Mason cases by Erle Stanley ardner, and four top DONALD AM-BERTHA COOL hits (which ardner writes under pen name . A. Fair") in hard-bound dou-e-size books . . . PLUS *another* erry Mason" and 2 MORE new teries in a giant Triple Vol-ne. These ELEVEN would cost 7.40 in publishers' orginal edi-ons — but you get them ALL *for ily $1.00* to introduce you to ne Detective Book Club

The Best NEW Mysteries — for LESS than 97¢ each!

Out of the 300 or more new etective books that come out ery year, the Club selects the ry "cream of the crop" — by tstanding authors like Erle tanley Gardner, Agatha Chris-e, Mignon G. Eberhart, John reasey and Van Wyck Mason. LL THESE and many other fa-ous authors have had their oks selected by the Club. Many e members themselves!

Club slections are ALL newly ublished books. As a member, ou get THREE of them complete one handsomely bound triple olume (an $8.85 to $11.50 value publishers' regular retail edi-ons) for only $2.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel your membership any time you please.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for ALL 11 Mysteries

Simply mail postcard promptly and we will send you at once the NINE Erle Stanley Gardner thrillers — PLUS the two other exciting mystery hits — all described on other side. However, this exceptional offer may never be repeated. Don't risk disappointment — mail postcard AT ONCE to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L.I.
New York 11576

The Case of the MISCHIEVOUS DOLL
Shills Can't Cash Chips
$6.45 in publ. ed.
$6 in publ. ed.
The Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET
TRY ANYTHING ONCE
The Case of the Amorous Aunt
Fish Or Cut Bait
$7.00 in publ. ed.
The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE
UP FOR GRABS
$7.00 in publ. ed.
publishers' editions: $10.50 value

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR ELEVEN MYSTERIES

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL COUPON

90-269

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB YF
Roslyn, L.I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the FOUR double-length, hard-bound editions of *eight* Perry Mason & A. A. Fair thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1 volume Club selection containing another Perry Mason and 2 other great mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL FIVE volumes, containing ELEVEN first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge).

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future triple-volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss } .....
PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY

Address.....

City..... State..... Zone.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

11 GREAT MYSTERIES

including 9 by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

World's No. 1 Mystery Writer!

5 Perry Mason THRILLERS

and 4 Donald Lam—Bertha Cool Mysteries

by "A. A. Fair" (Gardner's other name!)

PLUS 2 MORE TOP DETECTIVE STORIES

$~~37.40~~ in publ. eds. Yours $1 as a new member FOR ONLY

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
The Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET
MISCHIEVOUS DOLL
The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE
UP FOR GRABS
Fish or Cut Bait

You get 8 GARDNER-FAIR Hits in 4 double-size, full-length, hard-bound books

Volume 1

1 Gardner's Case of the DARING DIVORCEE

A murder weapon vanishes and Perry *faces a stretch in San Quentin!*

2 A. A. Fair's UP FOR GRABS

Was the hospital sneak-out already *dead* when she left that awful night?

Volume 2

3 Gardner's Case of the AMOROUS AUNT

Perry's client, accused of murder, has the motive *and* the opportunity!

4 A. A. Fair's FISH OR CUT BAIT

Bertha Cool is drugged the night her client's enemy is *murdered!*

Volume 3

5 Gardner's Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET

To handle a blackmailer, says Perry, *"kill him!"* Somebody does just that!

6 A. A. Fair's TRY ANYTHING ONCE

Donald Lam spends a night in a motel and runs right into MURDER!

Volume 4

7 Gardner's Case of the MISCHIEVOUS DOLL

When he's accused of deceiving the jury, Perry says, "no explanation!"

8 A. A. Fair's SHILLS CAN'T CASH CHIPS

Donald Lam, investigating an insurance case, faces a *murder* rap!

PLUS

Another Exciting Perry Mason by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

AND

2 MORE TOP-FLIGHT MYSTERIES IN THIS "3-in-1" VOLUME

9 The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE
by Erle Stanley Gardner

Perry has to fend hims when vindic D.A. Burger cuses him framing an tempted murd

10 OUT OF TH DARK
by Ursula Curt

Just a harml prank, wasn't Libby? But not funny as *killer's han grip your thro*

11 THE QUARR
by Robert L. Pi

Courtroo threats don bother the jud But a bomb planted in h chambers — *blast him to bit*

Continued on In

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

First Class Permit No. 47 — Roslyn, N. Y.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED